

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

GENESIS シリーズ

境界線 上の ホライゾン V

下

電撃文庫



Installation

installation



installation

Crossdressing

Or rather, Toori.

There isn't really anything to say, or I'm not sure what I would do if there was, but choosing the crossdresser for the cover was to represent what's in the book. Yes.

Historically, Far Easterners have done crossdressing jokes since ancient times, which is pretty rare when compared to the legends and history of other nations and regions. It makes me think our ancestors really had a niche industry going there.

Other legends have gods that are both sexes and gods that transform between the sexes, but crossdressing isn't so common.

This is because the Far Eastern legends include the concept of purification, so "changing your appearance" means to "purify the status quo" in order to "become something else", "do something else", or "leave your everyday life".

When you combine this with the concept of *hare* and *ke*, "changing your appearance" is directly linked to festivals and celebrations.

In the Far East, the sun god is a woman and that might have supported the crossdressing idea that a change is making things more "correct".

And in ancient times, things like makeup, fashion, dancing, and singing were not parts of everyday life, so they too counted as "changing your appearance" and were a sign of shifting from everyday life to another realm.

Toori's crossdressing has its foundation in that, so you can say he is having a one-man festival.

That would be why it earns him Blessings as a substitution.

His nudist jokes are also a festival, but since it requires more preparation, the crossdressing earns more Blessings.

Y'know, like how in production games something that took more raw materials can be sold for more.

By the way, Hori-ko can punch nudist Toori by saying he will get a chill, but that logic doesn't work when he's crossdressing.

Yes, so as a result, that one frustrates Hori-ko a lot more.

I guess you would call that a double-edged sword.

Anyway, that's how it ended up this time, so Toori has a lot to think about.

Of course, he'll just go shopping for some things with his sis and the others.

(Kawakami Minoru)

**Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon - Horizon on the
Middle of Nowhere - 5B**



——しっかりしねえとな。

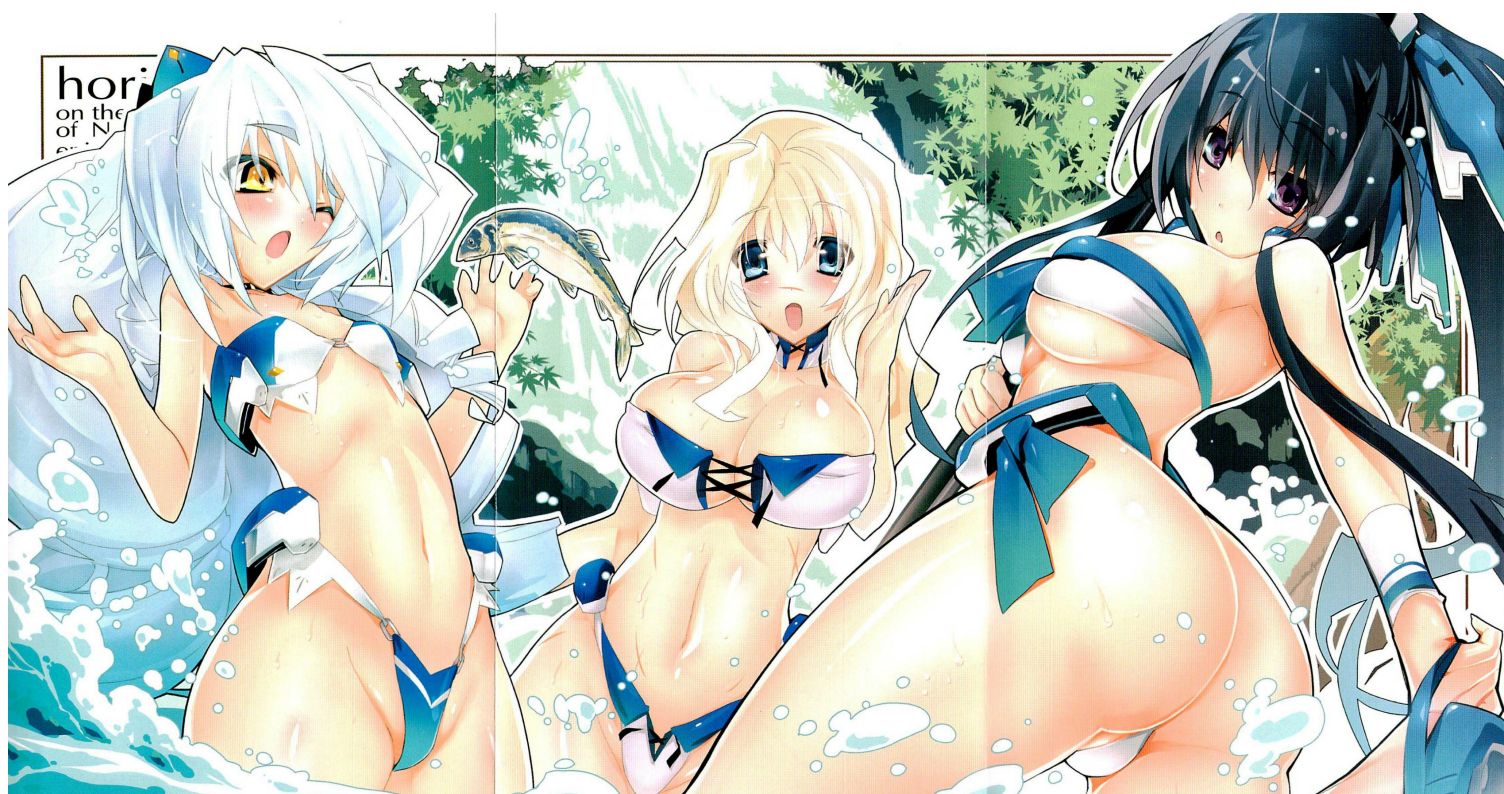
V
下

川上 稔

イラスト・さとやす (TENKY)

—We need to get our act together.

Characters





Frightening Ariadust News

恐怖ありゃーだと新聞

通神版・七月

鈴様ご尊顔（提供：賢姉様）



夏です。恐怖のお時間です。
しかしたまには冒頭から恐怖
じゃなくてもいいじゃないか。
ええ。奥多摩にあるメイン
学生向けの銭湯「鈴の湯」
にて、最近また鈴様の御姿が
拝謁出来るようになりました。
ただ、気をつけないと、
鈴様と思えば平然と女装だっ
たりで、さらには、
「スモール！」
とか叫ばれて当方の正気度が
みるみる下がる可能性もある。
というかさっき食らった。
あれは即座に気づけばまだ
いいが、家に帰った後で
気づいたりすると死確定。
まさに恐怖である。
（文責：武蔵前髪枠推進委員）

謎の怪異

さて本論。昨今、武蔵内、特に多摩と奥多摩
を中心に、ある怪異が頻発している。
それは「闇色の腕」（書記命名）と
呼ばれるもので、深夜から朝方に掛けて
出現する。多くは両腕分がセットで、床上
を高速で這っていったかと思えば、水場
で何かやっているという、そのような報告が
相次いでいる。
今のところ危害を加えられたという話も
無く、人によっては「炊事道具を洗って
いた」「椅子で休んでいた」「覗きに行く
総長にカンチョーくれていた」という目撃
情報もある。
出来ることならば、これが無害なまま沈静
してくれれば、と願うものである。
（文責：明日の恐怖研究委員）



謎の腕（想像図）

Title: Frightening Ariadust News Top right: Divine Transmission Edition: July
Above upper picture: Suzu-sama's Countenance (Provided by: Wise Sister) Right
of upper picture:

It's summer. The most frightening time of year. But we don't always have to start off with the frightening stuff, right? Right. Lately, you have been able to see Suzu-sama at Okutama's primary student-oriented bath, Suzu's Bath. But if you aren't careful, you'll find out what you thought was Suzu-sama was actually a crossdresser. And it's possible he'll yell "Small!" which will visibly reduce the victim's sanity. In fact, that happened to me a bit ago. Noticing it right away is one thing, but if you only realize it after returning home, your death is assured. Truly frightening.

(By: Musashi Bangs Promotion Committee)
Left of bottom picture:

Truly Mysterious Phenomenon

Now for the main topic. Recently, a certain mysterious phenomenon has been making frequent appearances on the Musashi, especially around Tama and Okutama. It is known as the Dark Arm (named by the Secretary) and it appears from late at night to early in the morning. It usually appears as a set of two arms and more and more reports are coming in of people seeing them quickly crawling along the floor and then doing something in the water area.

There are no reports yet of anyone being harmed and witness reports say they were washing dishes, resting on a chair, or performing a *kanchou* on the Chancellor when he was trying to peep.

If at all possible, we hope this will settle down before anyone is harmed.

(By: Tomorrow's Fear Research Committee)
Below bottom picture: Mysterious Arm (Artist's Depiction)

Far Eastern History

First of all

Humanity did not create history on their own

And they did a lot of reckless things

Hopefully, this will help provide a view of that past

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Illustrations: Satoyasu (TENKY) Cover Design: Watanabe Kouichi (2725 Inc)
Book Design Concept: TENKY

Characters

● 武蔵

 <p>葵・喜美 トーリの姉でエロとダンスの神を信仰する。基本的に 高圧で応用的に身勝手。</p>	 <p>葵・トーリ 主人公。武蔵アリアダスト学院の総長兼生徒会長。 “不可能男”。</p>
 <p>浅間・智 武蔵の主社である浅間神社の娘。トーリや喜美の幼 馴染み兼人生の被害者。</p>	 <p>あずま 東 帝の子供で半神。能力など全て封じられて武蔵で生 活する。</p>
 <p>アデーレ・バルフェット 仏蘭西から流れてきた従士家系。眼鏡娘。</p>	 <p>いとう けんじ 伊藤・健児 快活なインキュバス。全裸で禿のマッスル系。通称イト ケン。</p>
 <p>おひろしき ぎんじ 御広敷・銀二 ハート様系体格の食通でオタク。</p>	 <p>キヨナリ・ウルキアガ 第二特務。航空系半竜で異端審問官志望。通称ウ ッキー。</p>
 <p>シロジロ・ベルトーニ 会計。武蔵の商工会の若手幹部。</p>	 <p>てんぞう 点蔵・クロスユナイト 第一特務。いつも帽子などで顔を隠す忍者で使いっ 走り。</p>
 <p>トウサン・ネシンバラ 書記。歴史好きの作家志望者で同人作家。</p>	 <p>なほ まさ 直政 第六特務。機関部で働く姉御。煙草はふかすわデカ い声で笑うわで。</p>
 <p>ネイト・ミトツダイラ 第五特務。水戸松平の襲名者で騎士家系。人狼ハ ーフ。</p>	 <p>ネンジ HP3くらいのスライム。男らしい。</p>
 <p>ノリキ 家族を支える勤労少年。不器用型格闘家。無口で 無愛想。</p>	 <p>ハイディ・オーゲザヴァラー 会計補佐。シロジロのパートナーで白狐エリマキつき。</p>
 <p>ハッサン・フルブシ カルピスマーク系インド人。カレーだけ食って飲んで生 きてる。</p>	 <p>ペルソナ君 バケツヘルムの超マッチョ。無口で怪力で心優しい。</p>
 <p>ホライゾン・アリアダスト トーリの幼馴染みで現三河君主。現在自動人形中。 感情が大罪武装の部品として奪われている。</p>	 <p>ほんだ ふたよ 本多・二代 元三河の学生。本多・忠勝の息女。自称拙者、御座 る語尾の濃い目。</p>
 <p>ほんだ まさむね 本多・正純 副会長。昨年度の三河からの真面目転入生。いろい ろ家庭の事情あり。</p>	 <p>マルガ・ナルゼ 第四特務。黒髪六枚翼の白魔術師。漫研所属。</p>
 <p>マルゴット・ナイト 第三特務。金髪六枚翼の黒魔術師。笑い顔の方。</p>	 <p>ミリアム・ポークウ 車椅子生活のため、在宅就学している少女。</p>
 <p>ひかい しずく 向井・鈴 目が見えないけど頑張る少女。皆のストッパー。</p>	 <p>たちばな むねまさ 立花・宗茂 元三征西班牙第一特務。アモーレ。現在は襲名解 除で再起願中。</p>
 <p>たちばな かん 立花・間 元三征西班牙第三特務。宗茂の嫁で砲撃系義腕 少女。五十回。</p>	 <p>メアリ・スチュアート 英国女王エリザベスの異母姉。金髪巨乳。点蔵の未 来嫁として同居中。王賜剣一型のオーナー。</p>
 <p>みしな ひろ 三科・大 機関部部長の孫娘。メカ好き。直政の後輩にあたる。“だい”じゃ なくて“ひろ”。</p>	 <p>みしな しゅういち 三科・翔一 三科・大の父。泰造の義理の息子。関東IZUMOの長。</p>
 <p>とみ やしやす 里見・義康 里見教導院生徒会長の少女。小さくても泣かない。 武神“義”を操る。</p>	 <p>おおくぼ ちか 大久保・忠隣 極東には珍しい二重襲名の代表委員長。二年。イン チキ関西弁。</p>

character

character

● 教導院関係者



かのう
加納

大久保の侍女。自動人形。風紀委員長。二年。



だて しげ ざね (なるみ)
伊達・成実

政宗の従弟役。伊達家の副長で、機動殻”不転百足”を使用。余裕あり気味おねーさん風。



まき こ
オリオトライ・真喜子

高速戦闘型女教師。いつもジャージ。



さかい ただ つぐ
酒井・忠次

武蔵アリアダスト学院学長。昔はかなり出来る人でしたが左遷。



むさし
“武蔵”

武蔵を統括する自動人形で総艦長。辛辣口調がたまありません。



ヨシナオ

六護式仏蘭西から派遣された武蔵王。教導院への否決権と武蔵の管理権を持つ。



さん よう みつ き
三要・光紀

三年竹組の担任。オリオトライを先輩と仰ぐ。何か微妙に不幸。

● M.H.R.R.



は しば どう きち ろう
羽柴・藤吉郎

M.H.R.R. 副会長、自動人形の猿面少女。おどおどボンバー系。



マティアス

M.H.R.R. 旧派の代表。総長兼生徒会長。傀儡楽しいです!



まえ だ とし いえ
前田・利家

旧派の代表。会計。霊体になっており、妻の“まつ”と日々平穏に中間職。



ふく しま まさ のり
福島・正則

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー1。御座ります語尾を使用する。



か とう きよ まさ
加藤・清正

羽柴麾下。十本槍のナンバー2。金髪巨乳系で丁寧口調。



たけ なか はん べ え
竹中・半兵衛

十本槍の九番。羽柴の軍師。長寿族のお気楽姉さん。聖譜記述では毛利攻めの前に死亡するので、黒田・官兵衛も二重襲名。



かた ぎり かつ もと
片桐・且元

十本槍の十番。真面目少年で交渉役などもこなす。かなり遊ばれ気味だけど気にせず男らしく頑張ります!



か とう よし あき
加藤・嘉明

十本槍の四番。金髪金翼の白魔術師。鋭い口調でものを言う一方で、意外に全体のまとめ役。



わき さか やす はる (アンジー)
脇坂・安治

十本槍の五番。黒髪黒翼の黒魔術師。お気楽系だが、本当にお気楽系。場の流れをパワーアップ。

● P.A.Oda



さつ さ なり まさ
佐々・成政

P.A.Oda 六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。ヤンキー系で突撃派。でも几帳面。



しば た かつ いえ
柴田・勝家

P.A.Oda 六天魔軍、五大頂の一人。体育会系。最近結婚して困りもの。



ふ わ みつ はる
不破・光治

P.A.Odaの対上越露西亞現地会計。利家、成政と三人で“三人衆”と呼ばれる。



お いち
御市

柴田・勝家の妻。おっとり系バーサーカー。



もり なが よし
森・長可

P.A.Odaの中で最も雄度が高い好青年。インバウトの瞬間にヘッドが回る。



たき がわ いち ます
滝川・一益

築城や艦船操作に秀でたP.A.Odaの忍者武将。

character

●伊達



だて まさむね 伊達・政宗

伊達家の当主。竜神の力を受け継いでいる。伊達家の総長兼生徒会長でもある。



よし ひめ 義姫

政宗の母。鬼型長寿族と人間のハーフ。仙台伊達教導院の学長。



かた くら こじゅうろう 片倉・小十郎

伊達家の副会長。テンション上下が激しいが選沢式。

●最上



も がみ よし あき 最上・義光

「羽州の狐」と呼ばれる裏切り上等大名。極寒の最上を一代でまとめあげた辣腕。



さけ の べ 鮭延

義光様のフォローをする走狗ですモン!

●六護式仏蘭西



ルイ・エクシヴ

六護式仏蘭西総長。太陽王の爽やか好青年。神の血を引く。



もり てる ひと 毛利・輝元

六護式仏蘭西生徒会長。エクシヴの妻。ヤンキー系。将来、西軍の長として武蔵側の敵に回る運命。



三銃士のアンリ

戦闘系の女性型自動人形。リーダー格で、輝元の護衛役。制御式大刀の使い手。



三銃士のアルマン

戦闘系の男性型自動人形。広範囲重力制御の使い手。



じん ろう じょ おう 人狼女王

デュレンヌ。六護式仏蘭西の副長。ミトツダイラの母ちゃん。かなり大雑把な巨乳。



ミトツダイラの父

人狼女王の旦那。幸せいっぱいであつて泣いてしまう被害者。受け身と言うより攻め込まれ派。二十四日。

●北条



ほうじょう うし なお 北条・氏直

北条印度諸国連合の総長兼生徒会長。鬼型長寿族だが、自動人形の身体となっている。



こ た ろ う 小太郎

氏直についている少女忍者型の走狗。優秀なのだが子供扱い。

●真田



さな だ のぶ ゆき 真田・信之

真田の生徒会長兼総長。偉いんだか偉くないんだか解らないし強いんだか強くないんだか解らないけど長生きするタイプ。



さな だ まさ ゆき 真田・昌幸

信之のとーちゃん。真田教導院の学長。



うん の ろく ろう 海野・六郎

真田教導院の十勇士の七番。踊り子の傾奇者。舞踏型の剣術をこなす。



か け い じゅう ぞう 寛・十蔵

真田教導院の十勇士の十番。制御式の射撃術を用いる長身瘦躯。



み よ し い さ 三好・伊佐

真田教導院の十勇士の四番。別名は伊佐入道。制御式の武神を扱う少女。



あ な や ま こ す け 穴山・小助

真田教導院の十勇士の五番。人の良さそうな顔の男。忍術をこなす。



ゆ り か め の す け 由利・謙之介

真田教導院の十勇士の六番。剣術を得意とする。



ね づ じん ぱ ち 根津・陣八

真田教導院の十勇士の八番。狙撃を得意とする。



もち づ き ゆ き た だ 望月・幸忠

十勇士の九番。自動人形で爆碎術式を扱う。

character

● Musashi

- Aoi Kimi: Toori's older sister and worshipper of the god of eroticism and dancing. Fundamentally high-tension and selfish in practice.
- Aoi Toori: Protagonist. Musashi Ariadust Academy's chancellor and student council president. Mr. Impossible.
- Asama Tomo: Daughter of the Asama Shrine, Musashi's main shrine. Childhood friend and overall victim of Toori and Kimi.
- Azuma: Child of the emperor and a half-god. All his abilities have been sealed and he lives on the Musashi.
- Adele Balfette: From a vassal family that arrived from France. Glasses girl.
- Itou Kenji: Cheerful incubus. Nude, bald, and muscular. Known as Itoken.
- Ohiroshiki Ginji: Gourmet otaku with a Heart-sama style build.
- Kiyonari Urquiaga: 2nd special duty officer. Flying half-dragon. Hopes to be an inquisitor. Known as Uqui.
- Shirojiro Bertoni: Treasurer. Young leading member of Musashi's commerce and industry guild.
- Tenzou Crossunite: 1st special duty officer. Ninja and errand-runner who always covers his face with his hat.
- Toussaint Neshinbara: Secretary. Loves history, wants to be an author, and writes doujins.
- Naomasa: 6th special duty officer. Older sister type who works in the engine division. Smokes and laughs loudly.
- Nate Mitotsudaira: 5th special duty officer. Member of a knight family and inheritor of the Mito Matsudaira name. Half werewolf.
- Nenji: Slime with about 3 HP. Manly.
- Noriki: Laborer boy who supports his family. Clumsy martial artist. Silent and unsociable.
- Heidi Augesvarer: Treasurer's aide. Shirojiro's partner. Has a white fox named Erimaki.
- Hassan Furubushi: Calpis logo style Indian. Lives while eating and drinking only curry.
- Persona-kun: Super macho man with a bucket helmet. Silent, strong, and kindhearted.
- Horizon Ariadust: Toori's childhood friend and current ruler of Mikawa.

Currently an automaton. Her emotions were taken as parts for the Logismoi Oplo.

- Honda Futayo: Former Mikawa student. Honda Tadakatsu's daughter. Uses a strongly old-fashioned speech pattern.
- Honda Masazumi: Vice president of the student council. Diligent exchange student who arrived from Mikawa the previous year. Has various issues with her family.
- Malga Naruze: 4th special duty officer. Black-haired six-winged Weiss Hexen. Member of the manga club.
- Margot Naito: 3rd special duty officer. Blonde-haired six-winged Schwarz Hexen. Always smiling.
- Miriam Poqou: Girl who stays in her room because she lives in a wheelchair.
- Mukai Suzu: Blind but always gives it her all. Acts as everyone's stopper.
- Tachibana Muneshige: Former Tres España 1st special duty officer. Amore. Currently working to regain his inherited name.
- Tachibana Gin: Former Tres España 3rd special duty officer. Muneshige's wife and possessor of cannon-style false arms. Fifty times.
- Mary Stuart: Half-sister of English Queen Elizabeth. Well-endowed blonde. Living with Tenzou as his future wife. Owner of Ex. Collbrande.
- Mishina Hiro: Granddaughter of the engine division's chief. Loves mechanical things. Naomasa's underclassman. Her name is pronounced Hiro, not Dai.
- Mishina Shouichi: Mishina Hiro's father. Taizou's son-in-law. Head of Kantou IZUMO.
- Satomi Yoshiyasu: Satomi Academy's student council president. Small but does not cry. Uses the god of war Righteousness.
- Ookubo Tadachika/Nagayasu: A rare Far Easterner with a double inherited name. A second year and head of the representative committee. Speaks in a fake-sounding Kansai dialect.
- Kanou: Ookubo's maid. An automaton. Head of the public morals committee. A second year.
- Date Shigezane [Narumi]: Masamune's cousin. Vice chancellor of the Date clan and uses a mobile shell named Unturning Centipede. Confident

elder sister type.

● Academy Officials

- Oriotorai Makiko: High-speed battling teacher. Always wears a track suit.
- Sakai Tadatsugu: Musashi Ariadust Academy's president. Used to be a very able person but was demoted.
- "Musashi": Automaton that supervises the Musashi and overall commander. Her sharp comments are hard to put up with.
- Yoshinao: King of Musashi who was sent from Hexagone Française. Has a veto right toward the academy and has the authority to manage Musashi.
- Sanyou Mitsuki: Class 3-Bamboo's homeroom teacher. Looks up to Oriotorai. Somewhat sensitive and unlucky.

● M.H.R.R.

- Hashiba Toukichirou: M.H.R.R. Vice President and monkey-masked automaton girl. The nervous bomber type.
- Olimpia: Innocentius's older and younger stepsister. Current Pope-Chancellor.
- Matthias: Representative of M.H.R.R.'s Catholics. Student Council President. Younger brother of Chancellor and Emperor Rudolf II. Being a puppet is fun!
- Maeda Toshiie: Catholic representative. Treasurer. Samurai attendant that has become a ghost and is peacefully spending his days with his wife Matsu.
- Fukushima Masanori: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #1. Speaks in an old-fashioned way.
- Katou Kiyomasa: Under Hashiba's direct command. Ten Spears #2. The busty blonde type and speaks politely.
- Takenaka Hanbei: Ten Spears #9. Hashiba's tactician. Carefree long-lived girl. Dies before the invasion of Mouri according to the Testament, but has also inherited the name of Kuroda Kanbei.
- Katagiri Katsumoto: Ten Spears #10. Diligent boy who fills the negotiator role among others. Used as a plaything a lot, but he won't let it get to him and will do his best like a man!

- Katou Yoshiaki: Ten Spears #4. Gold-haired, gold-winged Weiss Hexen. Speaks sharply, but surprisingly tends to act as a mediator.
- Wakisaka Yasuharu (Angie): Ten Spears #5. Black-haired, black-winged Schwarz Hexen. The carefree type, but she truly is carefree. She powers up the flow of things.

● P.A. Oda

- Sassa Narimasa: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Delinquent and assault type. But methodical.
- Shibata Katsuie: One of P.A. Oda's Six Heavenly Demon Army and Five Great Peaks. Athletic type. Very troublesome after his recent marriage.
- Fuwa Mitsuharu: P.A. Oda's local anti-Sviet Rus treasurer. Her, Toshiie, and Narimasa are known as the Triumvirate.
- Oichi: Shibata Katsuie's wife. Gentle berserker.
- Mori Nagayoshi: Manliest young fellow in P.A. Oda. His head spins at the instant of impact.
- Takigawa Ichimasu: P.A. Oda ninja commander who excels at castle building and ship operation.

● Date Clan

- Date Masamune: Head of the Date clan. Inherits the power of the Dragon God. Chancellor and student council president of the Date clan.
- Katakura Kojuurou: Vice president of the Date clan. Full of intense highs and lows.
- Yoshihime: Masamune's mother. Half demonic long-lived and half human. Principal of Sendai Date Academy.

● Mogami Clan

- Mogami Yoshiaki: Betrayal-loving daimyo known as the Fox of Ushuu. Shrewd leader who unified frigid Mogami in a single generation.
- Shakenobe: The Mouse that follows Yoshiaki-sama, mon!

● Hexagone Française

- Louis Exiv: Hexagone Française's chancellor. Refreshing young man known as the Roi-Soleil. Has divine blood.
- Mouri Terumoto: Hexagone Française's student council president. Delinquent type. Destined to be Musashi's enemy as leader of the Western Army.
- Henri of the Three Musketeers: Female combat-style automaton. Acts as the leader and as Terumoto's bodyguard. Uses large remote-controlled swords.
- Armand of the Three Musketeers: Male combat-style automaton. Uses broad-range gravitational control.
- Reine de Garou: Turenne. Hexagone Française's vice chancellor. Mitotsudaira's mom. All-around giant breasts.
- Mitotsudaira's Father: The Reine des Garous's husband. A victim who is full of happiness and readily cries. Not so much passive as always under attack. 24 days.

● Houjou

- Houjou Ujinao: Chancellor and student council vice president of the Houjou Association of Indian States. A demonic long-lived, but has an automaton body.
- Kotarou: Ninja girl Mouse that accompanies Ujinao. Skilled but gets treated like a child.

● Sanada

- Sanada Nobuyuki: Sanada's Student Council President and Chancellor. Unclear if he's important or not and unclear if he's strong or not, but he is the type to live a long time.
- Sanada Masayuki: Nobuyuki's daddy. Principal of Sanada Academy.
- Unno Rokurou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #7. Eccentric dancer. Uses a dancing style of swordplay.
- Kakei Juuzou: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #10. Tall skinny man who uses a remote-controlled shooting technique.

- Miyoshi Isa: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #4. AKA Isa Nyuudou. Girl who uses a remote-controlled god of war.
- Anayama Kosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #5. Looks like a nice guy. Uses ninja techniques.
- Yuri Kamanosuke: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #6. Specializes in sword fighting.
- Nezu Jinpachi: Sanada Academy Ten Braves #8. Specializes in sniping.
- Mochizuki Yukitada: Ten Braves #9. Automaton who uses explosion spells.

Glossary

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013.jpg

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014.jpg

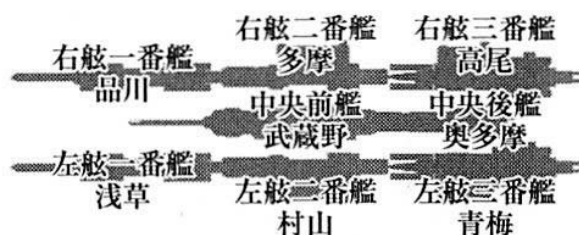
words

・**歴史再現**:聖譜記述を人々が再現して世界の流れを保つこと。

・**奉納**:神に、神の喜ぶものや内燃拌気を納めること。献納。

ま行

- ・**走狗【マウス】**:神道教譜と奏者の仲介をする霊獣型デバイス。他教譜では走徒とも言う。
- ・**魔術**:欧州で絶賛迫害中の民間術式。
- ・**末世**:この世の終わり。聖譜の歴史記述が途切れる一六四八年のこと。
- ・**帝**:神格者、京にて神器による地脈制御を行っていると考えられる。俗世に干渉しない。
- ・**三河**:元信公の地脈炉暴走崩壊で消滅。
- ・**水戸**:奥州の南、江戸の北。ミツダイラの所領地。
- ・**武蔵**:航空都市艦。極東に許された唯一の独立領土。



- ・**武蔵アリアダスト学院**:武蔵上、奥多摩に存在する極東の代表校。
- ・**矛盾許容**:この世界の基礎能。あらゆる物理法則の同時存在を叶える。
- ・**ムラサイ**:Tsirhcとは別に聖譜を信奏する後発派。

ら行

- ・**竜属**:竜のこと。精霊系の天竜と、獣系の地竜がいて、天竜を上位とする。ゲルマン侵攻の歴史再現で覇を唱えたものの、敗北。今は各地に散っている。
- ・**流体**:矛盾許容型の空間構成要素。
- ・**流体燃料**:燃料として精製された流体。外燃拌気や、流体駆動器に用いられる。
- ・**流体駆動器**:流体の空間変異力を用いた駆動器。効果は内部の紋章などによって変化する。
- ・**流体炉**:空間から流体を抽出精製する炉。地脈炉より出力は低いが比較的安全。
- ・**竜脈炉**:莫大量の流体を爆発させ、半径数キロを消滅させる爆弾。羽柴が有する。
- ・**黎明の時代**:聖譜成立以前の時代のこと。

A

- Academy: An educational facility. Used as the center of political and military power. Tend to have many branch schools.
- Academy Rules: The basic laws upheld between academies. Agreed to by the Testament Union.
- Age of Dawn: The age before the Testament was established.
- Amako clan: Former IZUMO land. Destroyed by Mouri and Hexagone Française.
- Anti-Delay Pro-Tuning: The action taken during the Age of Dawn that led to the creation of the Testament and Harmonic World.
- Apocalypse: The end of the world. 1648 when the Testament's history descriptions end.
- ArchsArt: England's primary corporation.
- Ariake: Floating dock for the Musashi provided by Kantou IZUMO.
- Armada battle: A naval battle fought between England and Tres España. Tres España planned to land on England but their fleet was destroyed.
- Artificial Apocalypse: A compressed ley line distortion created in England's Avalon to research the Apocalypse.
- ATELL: The smallest unit of ether. Used for spells.
- Avalon: A space created in England to research the artificial Apocalypse.
- Azuchi Castle: P.A. Oda's giant aerial warship.

B

- Blessings: The amount of ether needed for a human to exist for one hour. 3600 ATELL. Conversion unit for a spell's ATELL consumption.
- Bunroku Campaign: Hashiba's invasion of Korea. The first one.

C

- Catholic: The old mainstream version of Tsrhc.
- Chancellor's Officers: An organization led by the chancellor which leads the academy and performs work such as defense.
- Change of Rank: Having one's clan taken away.
- Contradiction Allowance: The foundational ability of the world. Allows the simultaneous existence of all sorts of physical laws.

D

- Divine States: Former name of the Far East.
- Divine Weapon: A weapon that, unlike a normal weapon, has a unique ability.
- Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies: The original academies that existed during the Age of Dawn. More a guiding frontline base than a place of learning.
- Dragon Line Reactor: A bomb that uses a runaway ley line reactor to destroy a wide area.
- Dragon Races: The dragons. There are Celestial Dragons which are spirits and Terrestrial Dragons which are beasts and the Celestial Dragons are of a higher level. They dominated during the history recreation of the Germanic invasions, but ultimately lost. They are now scattered across the land.
- Dunhi: A religion. Focused on reincarnation.

E

- Edel Brocken: Magic brand. Location of headquarters unknown.
- Eisenritter: Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Protestant principalities.
- Emperor: A divine individual who is said to control the ley lines using the Imperial Regalia in Kyou. Does not interfere with the world.
- England: Uses a floating island and does not control any Far Eastern land or Far Eastern daimyo.
- Ether: Component that makes up contradiction-allowing space.
- Ether Engine: An engine that uses ether's space-altering ability. The effect changes based on the internal crest.
- Ether Fuel: Ether that has been purified into fuel. Used as External Blessings or for ether engines.
- Ether Reactor: A reactor that extracts and purifies ether from the air. Has a lower output than a ley line reactor, but is relatively safe.
- Europa: Hexagone Française's primary corporation.
- Excalibur: Has a first and second version.
- External Blessings: Blessings accumulated outside of oneself. Ether fuel is an example.

F

- Fan Gang: Qing brand. Durable but a bit rough.
- Far East: Name of the Divine States after the Harmonic Unification War.
- Fino Alba: K.P.A. Italian brand. Their use of springs is their selling point.

G

- God of War: A giant humanoid machine that people combine with to move.
- Graduation: No limit for nations other than the Far East. Far Easterners must graduate at 18.
- Grande y Felicísima Armada: Tres España's fleet for the Armada battle. Made up of cutting-edge ships.
- Great Return: When Hashiba returned with all his troops while attacking Mouri during Nobunaga's assassination. The rushed march covered about 200 km in less than ten days.

H

- Harmonic Territory: Locations where the fallen Harmonic World Divine States unified with the real world while breaking apart.
- Harmonic Unification War: A war between the harmonic world residents and the real world (Divine States) residents after the destruction of the harmonic world. The harmonic world residents won and began a provisional rule over the Divine States.
- Harmonic World: A former alternate space that copied the Divine States. Preserved through ley line control.
- Hexagone Française: Mouri clan + France.
- Hidetsugu Incident: Hidetsugu, Hashiba's nephew who was going to be left in charge during the next generation, earned Hashiba's anger and was forced to commit suicide. The reason is unknown, but his concubine Komahime had to commit suicide with him.
- History Recreation: Recreating the Testament descriptions to maintain the path the world takes.
- Holy Spells: Tsirhc spells. The Catholics are related to the Testament and holy individuals while the Protestants derive power only from the Testament.
- H.R.R.M.: Holy Knights Ironworks Guild. Primary corporation of M.H.R.R.'s Catholic principalities.

I

- Inherited Name: The name of a historical figure given to an appropriate individual for the history recreation.
- Internal Blessings: blessings stored within oneself.
- IZUMO: The Far East's largest corporation. The headquarters for Far Eastern shrines and the corporation that built the Musashi.

J

- Judge/Judgment: Means “understood”. Used by criminals.

K

- K.P.A. Italia: Association of Aki States + Union of Italian City States.

L

- Laws for the Samurai Clans: Laws established after the Matsudaira clan established the Edo Shogunate. It determined the status of the samurai clans, but it centralized power by declaring a 'Change of Rank' if a clan or castle had no heir.
- Ley Line: The thicker of the pathways through which ether flows.
- Ley Line Reactor: A reactor that extracts and refines ether from ley lines. Can easily cause ley line mutations and destroy everything within several kilometers if they explode. Due to their instability, they are banned by the Tsirhc religion.
- Logismo Oplo: Weapons of mass destruction created on the motif of the seven deadly sins.

M

- Magic: Folk spells currently under persecution in Europe.
- M.H.R.R.: Hashiba clan + Holy Roman Empires.
- Mikawa: Destroyed by the collapse of Lord Motonobu's ley line reactor.
- Mito: South of Oushuu and north of Edo. Mitotsudaira's territory.
- Mlasi: A later non-Tsirhc religion that also worships the Testament.
- Mouse: A spirit beast device to act as an intermediary between the Shinto religion and its musicians. Other religions use different names.
- Musashi: Aerial city ship. The sole independent territory allowed for the Far East.

[First Starboard Ship – Shinagawa/Second Starboard Ship – Tama/Third Starboard Ship – Takao/First Central Ship – Musashino/Back Central Ship – Okutama/First Port Ship – Asakusa/Second Port Ship – Murayama/Third Port Ship – Oume]

- Musashi Ariadust Academy: The Far East's representative academy which exists on Okutama of Musashi.
- Musician: A religion's worshiper.

N

- Novgorod: A large trade city on the western end of Russia. It is a floating city, but became a city of the dead after Ivan IV the Terrible's purge.

O

- Oat: A religion based on China's sages.
- Offering: Providing a god with something they will enjoy or Internal Blessings.
- Official Events: Refers to the ceremonies, exams, *etc.* that an academy must complete during each term. If these are not completed, the academy may not take part in any external politics.
- Orei Metallo/Nero: Ore or water containing ether. Can be used as ether fuel.
- Orthodox: The Orthodox Concerto religion. Sviet Rus's unique branch of Catholicism.
- Oushuu: The Tohoku region. The Date clan rules the east and the Mogami clan rules the west.
- Oushuu Fujiwara (Hiraizumi): A hidden village of the long-lived in southern Oushuu.

P

- P.A. Oda: Oda clan + Ottomans.
- Peace of Westphalia: The peace treaty that ended the Thirty Years' War.
- Protestant: A new style of Tsirhc created to escape the corruption of Catholicism and to adjust to the new age.
- Provisional Council: Group of adults who act as bureaucrats toward Musashi's student council, chancellor's officers, and student committees.

Q

- Qing-Takeda: Combination of China and the Takeda clan.

R

- Religion: Organizations or groups that worship a god or the Testament.

S

- San Mercado: Tres Españan brand.
- Shaja: Used in Mlasi regions and means “understood”. Originally meant “courage”.
- Shinto: Far Eastern religion. Worships the Far Eastern gods and uses divine music spells.
- Shirasago Enterprises: IZUMO’s shrine brand.
- Siege of Otate: Conflict over the succession of the Uesugi clan after Kenshin’s death. Uesugi Kagekatsu and Nagao Kageatora fought and Kagekatsu won.
- Sign Frame: Spell device needed to use each religion’s basic protection.
- Song of Passage: Prototype of a fairy tale created in the Far East during the Edo period.
- Spell: Causing a miracle in a certain space by processing ether.
- Spirit Spell: Primitive spells used by talking to and borrowing the power of spirits, which are ether with a will of its own.
- Student Council: The organization that handles an academy’s domestic and foreign affairs.
- Substitution: Offering something to please a god instead of using Blessings to activate a spell.
- Sviet Rus: Uesugi clan + Russia.

T

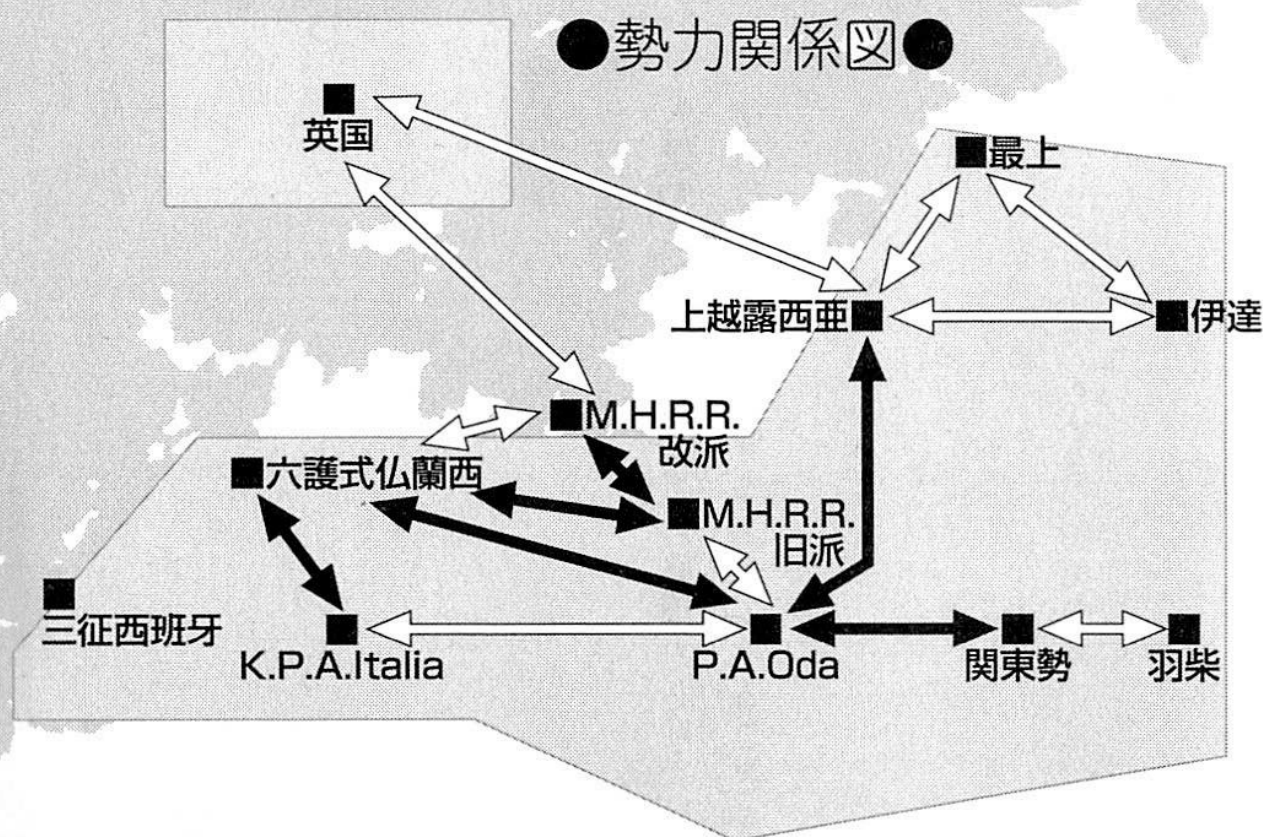
- Tes/Testament: Means “understood”.
- Testament: A history book that provides the history of the earth’s previous age. There are seven pairs and excerpts.
- Testament Descriptions: History of the earth’s previous age that is automatically updated by the Testament. However, it stopped updating after the description for 1648.
- Testament Union: An organization meant to lead the history recreation.
- Testamenta Arma: Weapons that use the ability of the Testaments.
- Tres España: Oouchi and Ootomo clans + Spain. Currently includes Portugal.
- Tsirhc: A religion which places the Son of God at the top. Worships the Testament.

World

File:Horizon5B

016.jpg

●勢力関係図●



■極東（武蔵）

- 三征西班牙
- K.P.A. Italia
- 英国
- M.H.R.R. 改派
- M.H.R.R. 旧派
- 六護式仏蘭西
- P.A. Oda
- 関東勢
- 伊達
- 上越露西亞
- 最上

⇄ 協働
→ 敵対

無矢印は放置
または緩い警戒

●武蔵の現状●



「姉ちゃん! 姉ちゃん! 滝川に勝ったけど学業云々って、どーすんだ一体!」



「フフフ学弟? 何とかして夏休み前に北条と戦闘して、関東における信長暗殺以後の状況で、松平が関わるものを終了させておきたい、ってところね。そうすれば夏休み中に本能寺の変が起きても、夏休み後にはすぐ介入できるし、上手く行けば夏休み前にそれを起こせるわ」

The Story So Far:

Allow me to explain. To put it simply, even after shooting down Novgorod, our Vice President Masazumi could not stand the return to peace and tried to start a war with Houjou, but wasn't Houjou being monitored by Takigawa? Yes, so we fired another shot to bring down Takigawa's Shirasagi Castle, which seems to have satisfied her.

Then a boy named Katagiri of Hashiba's Ten Spears showed up and boldly told Masazumi to give war a rest and complete our official school events. That sound argument was a problem for Masazumi. Summer break is approaching fast, so it was even more of a problem! Our Toori responded while crossdressing to buy some time for Masazumi to calm her warmongering blood, but then Sanada's Chancellor Nobuyuki dropped from the sky for yet another problem! That would be the current situation.

Divine Chat Screenname List:

- Azuma: Azuma
- Asama: Asama Tomo
- Obscene: Itou Kenji (Itoken)
- Me: Aoi Toori
- Gold Mar: Margot Naito
- Righteousness: Satomi Yoshiyasu
- Scarred: Mary Stuart
- Silver Wolf: Nate Mitosudaira
- Still Got It: Reine des Garous
- Wise Sister: Aoi Kimi
- 481: Mishina Shouichi
- Tachibana Husband: Tachibana Muneshige
- Tachibana Wife: Tachibana Gin
- Smoking Girl: Naomasa
- 10ZO: Tenzou Crossunite
- Tonbokiri: Honda Futayo
- Sticky King: Nenji

- 83: Hassan Furubushi
- Flat Vassal: Adele Balfette
- Vice President: Honda Masazumi
- Bell: Mukai Suzu
- Hori-ko: Horizon Ariadust
- Mal-Ga: Malga Naruze
- Marube-ya: Heidi Augesvarer
- 847: Mishina Hiro
- Novice: Toussaint Neshinbara
- Musashi King: Yoshinao
- Four Eyes: Shakespeare
- Worshipper: Ohiroshiki Ginji
- Laborer: Noriki
- Unturning: Date Narumi
- Kagetsuna-kun: Katakura Kojuurou
- Fang: Oniniwa Tsunamoto
- Caretaker: Rusu Makikage
- Taki: Takigawa Ichimasu
- Great Upperclassmen: Shibata Katsuie
- O12: Oichi
- Lily Flower: Sassa Narimasa
- Omaeda: Maeda Toshiie
- Fuwaa: Fuwa Mitsuharu
- Mory: Mori Nagayoshi
- Nine Tail Girl: Mogami Yosahiaki
- Shigeko: Honjou Shigenaga
- KageV: Uesugi Kagekatsu
- Tomo-no-Bu: Saitou Tomonobu
- Nagaya-Stable: Ookubo Tadachika
- CAN: Kanou
- Llaf: Fukushima Masanori
- Kiyo-Massive: Katou Kiyomasa
- □□凸: Katagiri Katsumoto
- Kuro-Take: Takenaka Hanbei

Far Eastern Powers:

[Same map as in 3-A.]

Relationships Between the Major Powers:

[Same as 4-A]

Musashi's Plans:

Toori: Sis! Sis! We beat Takigawa, but now there's all this stuff about official school events! What do we do about this!?

Kimi: Heh heh heh. School brother? We want to find a way to battle Houjou before summer break so we can bring Kantou to a state beyond Nobunaga's assassination and get Matsudaira involved. If we do that, we can intervene after summer break even if the Honnouji Incident occurs during summer break and we might even be able to have it occur before summer break.

School Rules

Article 303 Line 2

- Humanity's primary duty is to recreate the Testament descriptions, so that will always take priority over school events.

Chapter 27: Trio on the Balance Beam

第二十七章

『平均台の三者』



さてどっちだ
さてこっちが
配点/(近くと遠くと)

Now, which one?

Now, this one?

Point Allocation (Close and Distant)

“Sanada boarded the Musashi saying they want to be friends!?”

In the depths of the night and in a grassy plain with forests on either side, a tall form raised her voice with her blonde hair blowing in the wind.

She stood in the *jinmaku* of the field camp in front of a line of black galleys. The girl’s armor was printed with the title “SPEER 02” and she frowned in front of the dinner table.

She placed a *lernen figur* next to her face and it bore her name: Katou Kiyomasa. Also...

“Fukushima-sama, is Sanada thinking of abandoning that place?”

She spoke to the girl in the *lernen figur* whose side-swept ponytail was tied high on her head. That girl, Fukushima, placed a hand on her chin and spoke with a note of doubt in her voice.

“...I am not so sure.”

“Why not?”

“It was apparently Sanada’s Chancellor and Student Council President who boarded the Musashi. That is not the Vice Chancellor faction.”

More of the Ten Spears voiced their understanding on the divine chat *lernen figur*.

Nari Nari Nari: “To preserve the clan after Sekigahara, Sanada splits into two factions: a Hashiba one and a Matsudaira one. The one that joins Matsudaira is the heir to Sanada, Sanada Academy Chancellor and Student Council President Sanada Nobuyuki.”

Black Wolf: “Does that mean Sanada is already looking to the future and trying to join Matsudaira?”

Nari Nari Nari: “I have determined that is part of it. Besides, the Sanada Ten

Braves, who serve Sanada Nobushige, the younger brother who joins Hashiba, have already opposed Musashi in a number of ways...”

Had Nobuyuki boarded Musashi to demonstrate that he was not Musashi’s enemy even if his younger brother was? But what bothered her was...

□□凸: “Umm, what am I supposed to do?”

Kiyomasa just about said something in response to Katagiri.

Musashi was apparently trying to figure out how to respond to Sanada’s sudden entrance. They would probably return to Katagiri eventually, but...

...What should Katagiri-kun do for now?

She could only tell him to wait until they got back to him. But...

AnG: “Ah ha ha. Kacky, wanna come take a bath? Kime-chan and I will wash you together.”

Kimee: “Angie, don’t say that. When we’ve done that to Katagiri lately, he reacts like a girl despite having a guy’s body, so it makes me want to upload it to a video site.”

□□凸: “Wh-why do you always barge in during my scheduled bath time!?”

...Wait.

Kiyo-Massive: “What have you 3 been doing?”

□□凸: “I-I haven’t done anything! I just have things done to me!”

How is that any different? wondered Kiyomasa.

Kiyo-Massive: “You three are disturbing the public morals. You need to do better.”

□□凸: “Yes, ma’am...”

It was somewhat worrying that only Katagiri responded.

But he uttered an “ah” soon thereafter.

□□凸: “And that hasn’t just happened here! All of you need to realize I put my bath last out of concern for all of you! Due to space limitations in our personal

ship, the Ten Spears were only allotted the one bath!”

“Yeah,” said Kiyomasa while placing a hand on her forehead.

Kiyo-Massive: “That’s true. And we are often running late due to training and patrols...”

AnG: “No. I do it intentionally because Kacky is fun to mess with.”

Umm, breathed Kiyomasa as she watched Katagiri groan on the *lernen figur*.

...I need to bring this conversation back on track.

With this and what happened before, Katagiri had to have taken a lot of psychological damage today. She had to help cheer him up before he planned out what to do here.

So she spoke up to prepare things for that:

Kiyo-Massive: “Katagiri-sama, I feel bad that you have to work so hard not to look at us when that happens.”

□□凸: “...You noticed?”

Kiyo-Massive: “Testament. ...I don’t like that us taking a late bath prevents you from being moved to tears as you read a shoujo manga in the bath, hum as you lightly kick your feet in the bath, and go ‘nn’ as you hand wash your body.”

□□凸: “That’s even worse than before! Way worse!!”

Kimee: “Wait, why do you hand wash your body? Why not use a scrubbing bag?”

□□凸: “The person before me always puts them away! I don’t know who it is, though!”

Tsurugi: “Huh, huh? I thought...I was the last person to take a bath. Am I not?”

□□凸: “No, you’re not! I am! Yes, my turn used to be between Kiyomasa-san’s and Nagayasu-san’s, but the timing never worked out and you two would be in there during my scheduled time! I wouldn’t be able to leave the bath and I would nearly die!”

Kimee: “Yeah, being trapped between those giant tits would be pretty

deadly...”

Kiyo-Massive: “Um, even if you’re trying not to look, I don’t think you should just stare at the wall the whole time you’re soaking in the bath...”

Tsurugi: “Right, right. It’s okay, Katagiri-kun. If you have any dirty thoughts, I’ll use a purification to temporarily castrate you. If you ever need something in the bath, just tell me.”

□□凸: “I don’t get any rights, do I!?”

“Calm down,” sent Kiyomasa.

Kiyo-Massive: “Let’s rework the bathing order. And the girls have more freedom as far as that’s concerned, so you get top priority, Katagiri-sama. Now, about that meeting...”

Katagiri responded to her words.

□□凸: “Oh, testament. I’m killing time speaking with their shrine maiden.”

When Sanada and Musashi began speaking, Katagiri was receiving advice from Musashi’s normal shrine maiden.

“That’s right. The girls here never, ever see me as a guy.”

“Oh, dear. Then do you want them to see you as a guy, Katagiri-kun? Romantically, I mean?”

“Eh? Oh, no, I didn’t mean it like that. Um, how should I put it?”

He appreciated how she would nod and wait for him to continue. She gave him time to think without pressuring him to speak.

Acting as a negotiator had taught him something: a lot of people would pretend to understand what he was saying while actually using clever words to guide him toward a certain opinion or toward agreement.

...Some people would have phrased that earlier question as “So you want them to see you as a guy, don’t you?”

They would pretend to understand while seeking agreement and trying to force everything to follow what they wanted.

They placed their conversational partner in their own framework and then forced that partner to follow that.

This shrine maiden was lewd, but she did not say things like that.

She asked questions to learn what he thought. So when he said...

“I think I do want them to treat me like a guy.”

She responded...

“And what do you mean by treating you like a guy?”

She did not decide for him what that meant and she did not simply parrot back the phrase as if what it meant did not matter.

She urged him on and focused on his opinion in order to bring their thoughts closer together.

It almost felt like facing a mirror.

And so...

“Well...”

He thought about something he had only had a vague idea about. And...

“Katagiri-kun? Boys and girls are different, but asking people to change how they treat you because of that can be a difficult thing, so be careful. And it seems the girls around you aren’t the type to change how they treat you, but do you know why that is?”

“Well...”

Once she said that, he caught on.

“Because emphasizing that I’m a guy wouldn’t mean much...”

“Why not?”

“Um, because I’m not very manly.”

“Have you ever tried crossdressing or been forced to?”

“I-I will become more manly!”

“Oh, so you have.”

“I-it was a long time ago! And only because none of the boy’s equipment fit me...”

Katagiri blushed when she giggled in a husky voice.

He could tell he had said too much and made her laugh at him.

Asama: “W-wait, Toori-kun! Why are you beginning a Shinto counseling session!? You’re not licensed!”

Silver Wolf: “That’s the problem with this?”

Me: “What are you talking about, Asama? How can the lewd shrine maiden of the Asama Shrine ignore this boy’s youthful worries!? Just leave it to me. If he’s troubled because he gets mistaken for a girl, then it’s only logical for a crossdresser to give him advice, right?”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. That’s right, foolish brother! Win his heart with your crossdresser’s charm!”

Gold Mar: “Is this a new genre?”

Mal-Ga: “Hmm, since it’s with one of the Ten Spears I can wait until the pre-Sekigahara event.”

Obscene: “But, Aoi-kun! That is some excellent counseling!”

Vice President: “Stop doing unauthorized diplomacy!!”

“Honestly...”

While the crossdresser bought time by talking with Katagiri, Masazumi had to figure out what to do with the person standing in front of her.

...Sanada Nobuyuki, hm?

They had dealt with the Sanada Ten Braves already. And this was the Chancellor and Student Council President of their Sanada Academy.

He was fairly tall and not exactly bad looking, but there was no confidence in his actions.

Uqui: “He seems like a coward to me.”

Righteousness: “His line when he appeared was certainly cowardly. Oh, 6th Special Duty Officer, Righteousness is in the hangar, so take care of it. I made a slash at high speed, so I’m going to visit the medical room just in case.”

Smoking Girl: “Satomi... Do you not have any information on Sanada?”

Righteousness: “Unfortunately, they’re just barely outside Kantou. ...But I do know one thing.”

Which was...

Righteousness: “Most likely, not even Houjou knows the internal situation at Sanada Academy. Officially, the Sanada Ten Braves, Sanada Nobuyuki, and his father Masayuki stand out, but the situation within the academy and with his younger brother Nobushige is still unknown. And at the Battle of Sekigahara, his father Masayuki and younger brother Nobushige side with the west while Nobuyuki sides with the east. That split allows Sanada to survive, but do you know what it means for Nobuyuki to be making an emergency visit now?”

Novice: “Lord Nobuyuki is not considered a valuable member of Sanada’s fighting force.”

“That’s right,” said Yoshiyasu and Masazumi nodded in agreement.

...I see.

The Sanada clan would later become Matsudaira’s enemy and ally. Their Chancellor and President, representative of the side that would ally with them, had paid them an emergency visit and there was no sign of movement from the side that would turn against them.

Nobuyuki’s appearance was disrespectful to his own position.

But it also indicated a certain fact:

Vice President: “The Sanada clan is looking beyond Sekigahara and has already internally split into their 2 factions.”

Novice: “It would seem so. The Testament says that Sanada joins Oda after Takeda’s destruction, but they join Houjou at the Battle of Kanagawa after Nobunaga’s death. But they ultimately oppose Houjou and also oppose

Matsudaira when we side with Uesugi. And after they side with Hashiba, they reconcile with Matsudaira and finally join Matsudaira. ...Then they split in 2 at Sekigahara.”

Mal-Ga: “What is with all that back and forth, betrayal and reunion? It sounds like melodramatic fanfiction.”

Masazumi placed a hand on her forehead and thought.

...This is troublesome.

After all...

“The Testament says the Ten Braves work for Nobushige, the younger brother. That means the older brother who is their Chancellor and President wouldn’t be here to apologize for the Ten Braves’ misconduct. And even if he was, it would mean his younger brother treats him like a gofer and he wouldn’t be a very valuable ally.”

Thus...

“The older brother Chancellor came here of his own free will. If not, he is not even worth speaking with. That about sums it up.”

“Um, Masazumi?”

Mitotsudaira smiled her way, but Masazumi had no idea why.

“What is it, Mitotsudaira?”

“Judge. You were saying all that out loud.”

She checked her right shoulder and saw Tsukinowa nodding off. The way he would sometimes start to fall over and quickly right himself was quite cute, but that was why the sign frame and divine transmission control had been ended.

That isn’t good, she thought as she looked forward to see Nobuyuki glaring at her.

This really isn’t good, she thought again. And on the divine chat: “This isn’t good. I let out too much of my honest thoughts there.”

“You haven’t entered the divine chat!” cut in Mitotsudaira. “You’re really saying it! Hurry up and rouse that anteater!”

“But I’d feel bad forcing him to wake up. He’s all tuckered out. He was working hard throughout that entire battle.”

Mitotsudaira stepped back and formed a quick scrum with the others. After a while, Horizon left the scrum and faced Masazumi. The automaton princess spoke with her usual emotionless voice.

“Judge. ...We will just keep going like this.”

“Horizon! Horizon! I thought we just decided to apologize even if we didn’t really mean it!”

Asama was saying too much as well.

But then someone else joined the conversation: Ookubo.

Nagaya-Stable: “Vice President. If we can get Sanada to join us here, it will benefit us in 2 ways.”

Inside the lit Musashi Ariadust Academy, all of the classrooms’ desks and chairs were pushed to the back due to the ship-tilting strategy. They had received advance warning of the strategy, so Ookubo and the others had pushed them there for safety.

Ookubo, the rest of the Representative Committee, and the Lifestyle Committee had returned to their classrooms. She and Kanou were currently returning the lectern to the front of their 2nd year classroom, but she could hear shouts from the other classes.

“Oh, no! The shock of the shellfire caused the porn games hidden in my locker to burst out!”

“Ah, whose desk did this *shudo* doujinshi titled Shingen-sama’s Mass Multiplication III fall out of!?”

“Who had half-eaten bread in their desk!?”

Kanou had opened a sign frame to write up the public morals violations, so that would be dealt with in due time. But for now...

Vice President: “Ookubo, what are the 2 ways accepting Sanada will benefit

us?”

Nagaya-Stable: “Judge. The first is that Sanada joining us is a history recreation from after Nobunaga’s death but before Sekigahara. Even if it is only in name, Sanada Nobuyuki is Sanada’s leader. His movements will support the history recreation or give us enough reason to begin one.”

That would be the biggest benefit for Musashi at the moment, thought Ookubo.

But there was another benefit from another point of view.

Nagaya-Stable: “We can eliminate the threat of Sanada from Kantou.”

Kanou mentally agreed with Ookubo as she carried the lectern with her.

...That is indeed important.

The threat of Sanada to which she referred was the Ten Braves and Sanada Nobushige who backed them.

CAN: “Sanada Nobushige can be seen as the commander of the Ten Braves and he causes much trouble for Matsudaira at Sekigahara and the Siege of Osaka that follows. At the Siege of Osaka in particular, there is a theory saying Nobushige’s final charge arrives very near to the center of the main Matsudaira formation.”

Novice: “Judge. They are a dangerous enemy for Matsudaira.”

The Secretary said more.

Novice: “As I said before, the history recreation has Sanada hopping back and forth between various powerful people after the Battle of Kanagawa, but they oppose Matsudaira in a few of those. We can’t have the Ten Braves attacking us each time as an ‘official history recreation’. So if Sanada Nobuyuki wants to side with Matsudaira here, we can use his authority as representative to get around having to deal with the history recreations in the middle. If we do that, Sanada won’t cause us any trouble until Sekigahara.”

Four Eyes: “It makes sense, but it sure is cowardly.”

Novice: “Not all of us are led by a queen who does everything her own way!”

Almost Everyone: “For once, I agree with him...”

Kanou also agreed.

...It is indeed cowardly, but it also makes sense.

Sanada was a small nation. Their academy was also small and was supposedly primarily composed of only a few dozen ninjas. The Testament Union’s almanac only listed Chancellor and President Nobuyuki, Principal Masayuki, Vice Chancellor Nobushige, and the Ten Braves who were treated as Special Duty Officers.

It did not provide any lists or specs of divine weapons or special abilities which the other nations generally provided as a show of force against their enemies.

That nation was telling everyone to start spying if they wanted any information.

“Milady, let’s provide the information we have. But...”

Kanou spoke to Ookubo who held the lectern across from her.

“This relationship with Sanada will likely be somewhat troublesome.”

Masazumi sent back some words of thanks when she received information on the Sanada clan from Ookubo.

Tsukinowa was still fast asleep on her shoulder, so Asama had put together a divine transmission control program that used the Mouse’s spare processing power while he slept.

At any rate, she had one thing to think about.

...I think it would strengthen Musashi to bring Sanada Nobuyuki under our command.

That would provide them with a history recreation past Nobuanaga’s death and leading to Sekigahara.

So she spoke to Sanada Nobuyuki who stood in front of her.

“Sanada, should I interpret this as a request to join Matsudaira?”

Nobuyuki nodded. In fact, he did so a second and third time. Then he opened his mouth to produce a somewhat hoarse voice and got down on one knee.

“Indeed! I visited here today to start down Sanada’s path of survival as soon as possible!”

“I see.”

Masazumi sat down to put herself on eye level with Nobuyuki and she opened her mouth.

“...We reject your offer.”

We need to deal with Sanada quickly, thought Masazumi.

She glanced over at the idiot jiggling his fake boobs and wiggling his butt toward Katagiri.

“Um, Sanada Academy.”

“Y-yes, what is it!?”

Sanada Nobuyuki’s tone grew rough and he stood up. She remained sitting, but he did not look down at her and instead tilted his head.

“Why would you reject my offer!?”

This is probably more about being angry than strong willed, thought Masazumi. *He isn’t looking down on me and he actually knows how to calmly stop himself,* she added.

...He can negotiate.

Understanding that, Masazumi lightly swept her right hand outwards.

She gestured toward Futayo behind her.

She then heard the girl lower Tonbo Spare.

They had no intention to attack and this man would be able to realize what that meant. So Masazumi opened her mouth to tell him something.

“If we were to accept your request, your life would be at risk.”

“—————”

After seeing him fall silent at the word “life”, Masazumi continued.

“Currently, Musashi is on the verge of having an Event Stop placed on us. Do you know what that means?”

‘You mean...you won’t be able to perform any active actions?’

“That’s right,” she replied while looking back at him.

He looked her right back in the eye.

...I see.

“You don’t want to die, do you?”

“O-of course not...!”

That was likely true. But within Sanada, his younger brother’s faction had to be overwhelmingly more powerful. After all, it would take an impressive force to charge at Matsudaira and reach the center, even if it was part of the history recreation.

So she knew their Chancellor and Student Council President’s status was in name only.

Sanada was preparing itself for the post-Sekigahara period, so he had essentially been driven out of Sanada.

He had no real power and no one supporting him.

But Oda was still a powerful presence in the world. Nobuyuki would later side with Matsudaira, so capturing him could be used to score points with Oda.

And so he would not want to be captured or killed.

...So ensuring his safety will be the first step in negotiation with him.

Masazumi felt like she had found one of the bargaining chips to use with him.

“So did you leave Sanada and come here because you didn’t want to die?”

But Nobuyuki reacted to that in a surprising way.

“...”

He avoided answering.

Mitotsudaira watched Nobuyuki's silence.

...Eh? Wh-why isn't he answering?

She had a simple reason for her confusion.

...I mean, when Masazumi asked him if he didn't want to die, he said "of course not"...

And yet he fell silent when asked if he left Sanada for that reason.

"...?"

When she gave him a questioning glance, he remained silent.

But he was not entirely motionless. He would occasionally twist his lips and look down awkwardly as if he wanted to say something.

It looked like he really wanted to say something about Masazumi's question.

But he remained silent.

...Why? He risked his life coming here, didn't he?

And as she thought that, she heard someone else speak.

The crossdresser said something with his back turned while he gave advice and wiggled his hips toward Katagiri.

Me: "That guy's pretty strong."

When she heard that, Mitotsudaira finally understood.

...Ah.

It was a simple matter. Sanada Nobuyuki's silence was not out of obligation for Sanada or any other political reason.

No, thought Mitotsudaira. In that case...

Silver Wolf: "Judge. I know what this must be..."

Asama, Kimi, and Horizon turned her way.

It was funny how all three of them nodded without paying any attention to each other. That meant they had been in similar circumstances and understood this.

So Mitotsudaira spoke.

Silver Wolf: “Masazumi, you too should understand how Lord Nobuyuki feels.”

Masazumi nodded.

...I did more or less understand.

Sanada Nobuyuki’s silence most likely applied to a position she had once been in.

In fact, most of Musashi’s residents had once been *like that*. But...

...We stopped being like that.

So she had briefly hesitated in responding to this man who had not stopped.

Vice President: “I agree with all of you.”

And so she spoke to Nobuyuki while still seated.

“We have information and guesses concerning what Sanada will do next. ... Specifically, that Sanada is already preparing for Sekigahara. Can I ask about that?”

Nobuyuki’s reaction was the same.

“———”

Silence and motionlessness.

He did not respond. He did not nod or shake his head. And seeing that, Masazumi thought to herself.

...I was right. He really isn’t fulfilling some kind of obligation to Sanada.

That was not what this silence was.

“No, that is right.”

Masazumi made that contradictory statement, and then...

Vice President: ' "Hey, idiot. Can I say the rest?"

Me: "Don't ask me; ask the guy in front of you. Ask if he's experiencing the same thing you did."

That idiot is as hard to deal with as ever, she thought with a bitter smile.

...“The same thing you did”? Don't just put it in the past tense like that.

That'll force me to realize it really is only in the past now.

But she replied with “judge” and spoke.

“Sanada Nobuyuki. My apologies. ...I seem to have asked the wrong question.”

“...?”

He wrinkled his brow in confusion and she stood up.

His eyelevel was indeed higher than hers. But their stance was equal now. They were not creating a difference in position as part of their bargaining.

And as they faced each other, Masazumi nodded and opened her mouth.

“Sanada Nobuyuki. ...Musashi Ariadust Academy has decided that your visit and request were made on your own discretion.”

“You mean...?”

“Needless to say, the Nobuyuki faction's decision to join Matsudaira in advance belongs to no one else. And the Musashi Ariadust Academy has accepted that you made that decision as Chancellor and Student Council President and you visited alone as a sign of good faith.”

So...

“Matsudaira will eventually receive your support, so we thank you for your bravery.”

Everyone watched as Sanada Nobuyuki listened to Masazumi's words.

“ ... ”

He remained silent, but he did react.

“Kh.”

He hid and wiped his eyes with his thick arms.

He was crying.

But he made sure not to let anyone see.

“I am in your debt...!”

With those words, he lowered his large body to one knee in front of Masazumi.

He lowered his head and breathed in.

“I, Sanada Academy Chancellor and Student Council President Sanada Nobuyuki, shall entrust myself to Musashi!!”

Chapter 28: Leader of the Diving Board

第二十八章

『飛び込み台の長』



いつになっても
いくつになっても
こだわってしまうもの
配点 (環境ゆえ)

No matter how much time passes

No matter how old you grow

You are always picky about this

Point Allocation (Due to Your Environment)

Someone else watched on as Musashi and Sanada interacted and reached their conclusion.

Two people watched the damaged and smoking Ariake from far to the north. One was the Yamagata Castle's Mogami Yoshiaki and the other was the Aoba Castle's...

Nine Tail Girl: "Masamune. Musashi has yet again shown us something troublesome. If they are powerful and yet support the weak, it will be difficult to instigate the smaller nations."

One-Eyed Dragon: "But I don't instigate the smaller nations."

Nine Tail Girl: "Heh heh. You're no fun."

"Is that so?" replied Masamune with a bitter smile. And she thought about...

...An understanding of Sanada Nobuyuki, hm?

Even the Date clan had a general idea of the situation in the small nation of Sanada. And they knew how their Chancellor and President Sanada Nobuyuki was probably being treated.

"If Sanada is moving ahead with their post-Sekigahara actions, he will have parted ways with his younger brother's and father's faction. With that lost power, he will either be kicked out or he will choose to leave after being left behind."

Katakura-kun: "Hi, Masamune-kun! Is it monologuing time!? Are you feeling lonely!? You're feeling lonely, aren't you!? I'm feeling lonely too! And now that you know how lonely you are, take a dive into my mental world! Oh, you don't have to send your knee in first or have your weapon at the ready! Look! Like this! Oh, what are you doing here, Yoshihime-san, Age Thirty...een! No, I

definitely said thirteen there, not thirty! Besides, the accurate number would be forty-...ah, what is that bandage wrapped around your elbow for? A lariat can't enter my mental world! You're starting with a reverse horizontal!? Yes, welcome! It's first come first serve and there's just one opening!"

Masamune broke the sign frame with a reverse horizontal chop. And then she spoke her mind.

One-Eyed Dragon: "So they have an understanding of small nations and their leaders."

Nine Tail Girl: "Yes. To be honest, that is Musashi's specialty.

Just her words were enough to tell the fox was enjoying this.

This aunt had a habit of saying everything she wanted and having as much fun as she wanted, just like she was toying with her prey before finishing it off. And at the moment...

Nine Tail Girl: "And you are still inexperienced on that front, Masamune. That is why you cannot instigate the smaller nations."

"That's true," agreed Masamune without smiling. But...

One-Eyed Dragon: "You said this was Musashi's specialty, aunt, but do that ship's residents understand that?"

Nine Tail Girl: "I imagine it's less that they understand it and more that they are so used to it that they don't notice it. After all, they all left a situation like that."

What was "like that"? Yoshiaki explained.

Nine Tail Girl: "Holding vainglorious pride is entirely meaningless. But...when you are alone, it can support you. That is what I mean."

One-Eyed Dragon: "And since the Musashi residents don't need that...they aren't alone?"

Nine Tail Girl: "Even if it was unavoidable, do you somewhat regret what happened with Narumi?"

Masamune did not respond.

This aunt could be very perceptive at times. But then she spoke again as if flipping her emotions around.

Nine Tail Girl: “Your silence is the same as Sanada Nobuyuki’s.”

“————”

Only the words “heh heh” appeared on the screen.

But when Masamune said nothing, there was a pause for a breath and...

Nine Tail Girl: “Once you are no longer *like that*, Narumi will be able to return at any time for a reason other than to remember old times.”

One-Eyed Dragon: “I hate how kind you are, aunt.”

Nine Tail Girl: “That’s fine, that’s fine. Heh heh...!”

There was a pause of a few seconds, presumably because she was holding her sides in laughter. And then...

Nine Tail Girl: “Sanada Nobuyuki. ...We can make some guesses about the current state of Sanada Academy, but even a Chancellor and President in name only has his pride.”

So...

Nine Tail Girl: “If he admits to those internal conditions, he will be admitting his visit today was due to being chased out.”

...*So that’s it.*

Masamune understood what her aunt was saying.

This was Sanada Nobuyuki’s pride. And to put it in words...

One-Eyed Dragon: “Even if he is willing to admit he doesn’t want to die, admitting he was chased out would mean he can no longer call himself Chancellor and President even in name only.”

That was likely why.

One-Eyed Dragon: “Musashi’s Vice President understood that, but she did not speak out of simple curiosity. Nor did she say anything to press him for

agreement or to guide him toward her opinion on the matter. But she did decide to treat Sanada Nobuyuki's visit for what it is on the surface. So Sanada Nobuyuki thanked her for treating him like Sanada's Chancellor and President and entrusted his actions to them."

Masamune thought, *Is this what they call politics?*

It seemed like their emotions were given precedence here.

But those actions were corrected by rational decisions, became the decisions of a nation, and moved the world.

One-Eyed Dragon: "Aunt."

Nine Tail Girl: "What is it?"

One-Eyed Dragon: "Is the world moved by emotion?"

Nine Tail Girl: "No. ...At Mikawa and England, it was moved by reason and emotion corrected it."

Masamune felt like she was being told not to rush things.

Nine Tail Girl: "Both emotion and reason move the world. But the Testament says the nations have begun to discuss and research an important question: are there rules governing that? And while we have our hands full ruling a single nation or region..."

No.

Nine Tail Girl: "As someone who failed to rule due to trouble finding an heir, this is not my place to speak. ...But, Masamune, you properly ruled a nation and passed it on, so this is an answer you must see. Musashi and Hashiba are the same, as they both bring about a time of peace."

The fox continued speaking.

Nine Tail Girl: "Musashi is a gathering of those who were lost, went missing, or left. They have all held pride at some point, but they cast it aside. And after casting it aside, they have accepted and been accepted by 'that person' and stay with him. ...I was worried they would not notice or grow careless because they had already passed that point, but it would seem that is not the case."

One-Eyed Dragon: “Aunt, I understand now why this has made Musashi all the more troublesome.”

Nine Tail Girl: “Ho ho? And why is that?”

“Testament,” replied Masamune while looking to the flat white object in the southern sky.

One-Eyed Dragon: “Musashi has corrected the other nations’ reason with emotion, but now they have corrected another nation’s emotion with reason. ... I think the nations with similar emotions will respond to this.”

Masazumi saw the man kneeling before her take a breath.

And a message reached the sign frame next to her.

Tachibana Wife: “That was an excellent decision, Vice President. ...As a warrior, it would be horribly shameful to explain how I ended up in my current position.”

I imagine so, thought Masazumi.

Those two were where they were now because they had lost a battle. But...

Tachibana Wife: “Musashi is a strange place.”

Tachibana Husband: “Is it?”

Tachibana Wife: “It is.” *Are we really so bad the Tachibana Wife has to mention it?* wondered Masazumi, but the girl continued.

Tachibana Wife: “At Musashi, no one says that we are training to regain our inherited names. They support us as if we are nameless and are working toward our first inherited name. There are times when I nearly forget how it felt to have that name taken from me.”

But...

Tachibana Wife: “And because no one tells us to forget either...it feels like we are being told to self-regulate our feelings and that we can keep our distance even if we cannot forget.”

Asama felt her heart pound when she heard Gin's words.

...Ah.

She had heard something similar once a long time ago.

...Toori-kun.

"Heh heh. My foolish brother is like that too."

From behind, Kimi pulled in Horizon, Asama, and Mitotsudaira. Her hair smelled just like his. And with that hint of peony, the entertainer sister spoke.

"When my foolish brother confessed to P-01s, he saw her similarities to Horizon, but he said he didn't care if she wasn't Horizon."

In that case, thought Asama.

...That confession was a way of saying goodbye to the past, wasn't it?

How did he feel now? They had not lost Horizon after all, but was this *a new present or a continuation from the past?*

"It is hard to say," said Horizon. "Everyone built up deep relationships with Toori-sama while I was gone. I arrived later and even if I have built up a relationship with him, I cannot hope to match the depth of the relationships Asama-sama, Mitotsudaira-sama, and Kimi-sama have with him."

"That's not..."

Asama started to reply but stopped herself.

Relationships were no one else's business. There was no point in someone else giving their opinion about them. But there was something she had to say.

"Don't worry. There are different kinds of relationships."

"Th-that's true. Yes," agreed Mitotsudaira. "For example, mine is a relationship between king and knight. And I think my king sees his relationship with you as a romantic one, Horizon."

"But...there are combining techniques such as *shudo* for confirming the bonds between a king and knight."

Tension filled Mitotsudaira's smile when Horizon said that.

...Ohh.

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh! This doggy nearly died just from having her throat rubbed, so I wonder how far she can go!”

Asama: “D-don’t say it like that, Kimi! If you provoke her, it might ignite her beast power and cause her to overthrow her master!”

Silver Wolf: “You’re not helping, Tomo!”

But Horizon ignored their argument and tilted her head. She did not seem to understand.

“If it is to include combination techniques, both the wife and concubine relationships apply. In that case...”

Asama listened to Horizon’s question.

“What is a relationship? It would seem actions are not enough to distinguish them. Conversely, if we are to prove that all of our relationships are of equal depth, we must all perform the same action.”

“—————”

Asama was left speechless, so Kimi spoke instead.

“Saying you eat at the same table is similar, but I like the way you’re looking at this, Horizon. A king treating people unequally can cause a kingdom to split.”

She then whispered something else while looking over at Asama and Mitotsudaira.

“So you two should decide what it is you want from my foolish brother.”

“I-I...”

Just as Asama started to speak, she turned toward Mitotsudaira and saw the girl smiling a little.

She interpreted that as a sign that she could keep the lid shut here.

...Th-that’s right.

At the very least, this was not the time to discuss any further developments.

Asama ignored Kimi behind her and placed her arms around Horizon and

Mitotsudaira's shoulders.

"Okay, okay. We need to focus on Masazumi, not the nonsense from the weird person behind us."

Kimi whispered "behind us" in the exact same tone, but Asama focused on ignoring her.

Then she saw Masazumi's words in front of her.

They were words, but they were not sounds. They were text.

Vice President: "I understand most of what's going on, but I would like to confirm some things about Sanada Nobuyuki's career. Give me whatever information you can."

Masazumi sat down once more.

In front of her, a man kneeled down and took deep breaths to calm himself.

It was Sanada Nobuyuki.

...This is an interesting person.

That's disrespectful of me, she thought. I'm looking down on him, she added before asking a question.

Vice President: "Neshinbara...how about it?"

Novice: "You want to know about Lord Nobuyuki's career, right!? This'll be long!? Are you sure!?"

Wise Sister: "Heh heh. Silly boy. How about summing it up in 5 words?"

Novice: "A life of barely surviving. I guess that would do it!"

Almost Everyone: "See, you can do it if you try!"

Four Eyes: "Congratulations..."

Uqui: "Well done..."

Bell: "Y-yeah... A-a r-round of applause..."

Novice: What!? Why are you treating me like the dumb kid!?"

Regardless, what Neshinbara had said was important.

A life of barely surviving.

That described Sanada as a whole. After all, it was a small mountain nation with Uesugi to the north, Oda to the west, Houjou to the south, and the Kantou forces to the east. Which meant...

...Sanada is a nation that is invaded on the way to somewhere else.

A nation needed territory and people. But even when they tried to gain territory and increase their population, they could not strengthen their nation well with other powers surrounding them on all sides.

So they desperately tried to hold back the surrounding territory while gaining the protection of the major nation they decided would be best. But...

Novice: “Even so, there are times when they have to fight on their own or with minimal support. On several occasions, Sanada Nobuyuki himself has sent a suicide unit of a few dozen to the center of the enemy forces or used an ambush to achieve victory.”

Smoking Girl: “But that was probably on the guidance of the Ten Braves, wasn’t it?”

Novice: “Lord Nobuyuki took part as well.”

Probably so, thought Masazumi.

...That would be his pride.

He wanted to be Chancellor and President in more than just name, so he joined the battle.

He might have been in the way on the battlefield, but he appeared on the frontline and fought.

He might not have been as useful as the Ten Braves with their special abilities, but he had trained his body and maintained his strength so he would not just be a burden.

And the man in front of her was...

...A normal person.

Everyone had different tendencies, body types, and dispositions, and those would determine what they could and could not do. Those could be viewed as “talent”, but they could also be seen as “gifts of hard work” when they were overcome.

This man named Sanada Nobuyuki would probably have been a diligent and somewhat strict person if the world was not the way it was. But...

Vice President: “He’s the kind of person who refuses to lie to himself and will not fall back.”

After typing out that text, Masazumi spoke out loud.

“Lord Nobuyuki. To reiterate, we cannot accept your request at the moment. Musashi is currently trying to see whether or not we can defeat Houjou. If we accept something that brings Sekigahara to mind, we will be forced to reevaluate our relationship with Sanada as well as our history recreation with Houjou and the related nations. ...And then you will be a target for the Testament Union, P.A. Oda, and even the nations trying to benefit from a relationship with Musashi. ...Thus, we cannot accept at the moment.”

“Th-then when can you...!?”

“Judge. We can hear you out once we have defeated Houjou. But to be more accurate...”

Masazumi breathed in.

“After Nobunaga’s assassination has been completed, by interpretation or otherwise.”

Tenzou sensed the pause to make a decision.

Nobuyuki stopped moving when he heard Masazumi.

Time seemed to flow slowly for a moment. And then...

...What will he do?

With that silent question, Tenzou lowered his hips slightly and leaned forward.

He was prepared to move in case Sanada Nobuyuki tried something.

Next to him, Mary used her fingertips to push her half of Excalibur toward him. She was telling him to use both swords.

Mitotsudaira and Futayo also prepared for combat.

And then Nobuyuki moved.

He swung his body down low and spoke.

“Judge.”

He clenched his hands and placed them on the floor on either side of his body.

“I leave that decision to you...!”

“Judge. Then, Sanada Nobuyuki, allow Musashi to introduce you as a guest to our ‘health resort’.”

Mitotsudaira listened to Masazumi’s response.

And she raised her hand.

“Mitotsudaira, prepare a safe place for him in Mito territory down below. He will need automaton guards, but he will be our guest and he must not be exposed to any danger.”

“Judge,” replied Mitotsudaira as she opened a sign frame. For the automaton guards, she first checked around Musashi and then sent instructions to the Mito government office.

...So he is staying at a health resort, not receiving our protection. Given Lord Nobuyuki’s personality, an unnecessarily heavy guard shouldn’t be necessary.

If he cared about his life, he would flee if his pride was not at risk.

So she needed to choose a location with plenty of options like that.

“I will prepare a place with a large longhouse. There will be employment opportunities and he will be able to support himself. ...What kind of status should he have?”

Masazumi answered that question.

“He won’t be able to spread his wings if he stands out. ...Send him as a reserve lecturer for Ariadust Academy and he shouldn’t have trouble getting along with people. Is that acceptable?”

“...Judge.”

Nobuyuki bowed toward Mitotsudaira and Masazumi over and over.

Oh, dear, thought Mitotsudaira as she sent the instructions to the government offices for Musashi and Mito.

“All done. Approval won’t arrive until later, so for today...”

“Yes,” said Asama. She had already prepared a map of the ship. “You can spend the night at the Atsuta Shrine on Musashi. If you use Musashi as a midway point on the way to Mito, you don’t have to go through Musashi’s immigration process, including the medical and customs checks.”

“I am in your debt...!”

With that, Nobuyuki’s body went limp.

He had relaxed.

His tense expression loosened up and sweat poured from his brow.

...That’s good.

With that thought, Mitotsudaira nodded toward Horizon and Asama.

But then Asama frowned.

Eh? thought Mitotsudaira when she saw that expression and where the girl was looking.

“...There!”

Asama shouted toward something that appeared behind Nobuyuki. It was a sign frame.

“Classification: Unregistered Reaction – Special – Forced Appearance from Covert Mode: Submit.”

Immediately, the air audibly burst behind Nobuyuki and something was blown

away.

It flew through the air. And as Mitotsudaira looked up at it, she heard Nobuyuki's voice.

"...Papa!!"

Masazumi saw a short old man in the sky.

The gray-haired man wore a Far Eastern uniform like a hakama.

"Nobuyuki...!"

Even as he shouted and flew through the air, he made a flip and a half to land on his feet.

And the old man kneeling there was Nobuyuki's...

"P-papa! Why are you here!? I-I can get by on my own!!"

"You fool...!"

The old man slapped Nobuyuki's face with his raised right hand.

Nobuyuki shrieked, held his cheek, and shook his body.

"You have guts claiming you can get by on your own, Nobuyuki! Just now, you were getting help from the Musashi Vice Chancellor and Mito Lord!"

Flat Vassal: "Does this argument mean the only way to get by on your own is to live a wild life while entirely alone and gathering all your own supplies?"

10ZO: "Well, Sanada Academy is primarily made up of ninjas, so that might actually be how they think."

Scarred: "On England's 4th level, we all helped each other out, so a ninja's life is so very impressive in comparison. ...Hee hee. Now I understand why you saved me and helped me, Master Tenzou."

"Y-Y-Y-Y-Your Majesty! 'That ninja' is rising to the top of Musashi's search list!"

Musashi's actions were the center of attention in England's Oxford as well.

Elizabeth frowned at the information arriving via IZUMO.

“ ‘That ninja’, huh? ...It would seem the Far Eastern people see things much like I do.” She snorted derisively. “Friends, I will never accept this just because my sister is happy, so fear not.”

England must have it tough, thought Masazumi as she asked a question.

Vice President: “Is someone leaking information on this meeting?”

Mal-Ga: “Whoever’s behind it, it seems to only be information on the ninja and his wife.”

Gold Mar: “Yeahhh, I wonder who it could be? Ah ha ha.”

Marube-ya: “Yes, who could it be?”

Righteousness: “Can’t you blame them all using joint responsibility?”

Asama: “I can cut off all data to prevent our own people from leaking anything out. What should I do?”

Vice President: “It’s harmless, so don’t bother. In fact, this helps because it doesn’t look like we’re holding a meeting.”

Crossunite gave her a silent look, but she decided to ignore it.

Anyway, Masazumi looked to the old man standing in front of her. A warning sign frame from the Asama Shrine was opened behind his neck and it was set to prevent any damage to Musashi.

“Old man, who are you?”

“Testament. My apologies. ...I am Sanada Academy Principal Sanada Masayuki!”

He faced her in a relaxed pose and lightly nodded.

“I am here to watch over my unworthy son’s departure and marriage!”

Marriage? wondered Horizon with a tilt of the head.

...On Musashi?

She saw the others tilting their heads as well.

The crossdresser alone was focused on his talk with Katagiri on the sign frame.

“Manliness? But that can be divided into two categories: things you can learn and things such as body type and personality that you can’t. Which one is more important to you? Oh, and I mean important to your ideal and your current self. ...Yes, it can be something else. There are no rules for this kind of thing.”

Bell: “Toori-kun is...amazing.”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. My foolish brother quite likes listening to people. He keeps things going at just the right speed for them to reveal everything!”

Mal-Ga: “This is pretty entertaining, so should I leak it out?”

Asama: “P-please don’t! What if people start asking the Asama Shrine about it!? My dad has been saying something about starting a new show recently, so this is a dangerous time!”

It is hard to tell whether he is useful or a nuisance, concluded Horizon in her heart. And when she looked forward, she saw Sanada Principal Masayuki facing Masazumi.

Horizon raised her right forearm and asked a question.

“Judge. I am going to get right to the point.”

“So you’ll be thrusting the point right on in there! Right, Horizon!?”

Horizon exchanged a thumbs up with Kimi and then continued.

“You, Nobu-...there are so many similar names I’m having difficulty telling them apart, but you there. You mentioned marriage, but who will be marrying whom?”

“Testament. In this case, it will be following the Testament. Meaning...”

Masayuki looked at someone behind Horizon.

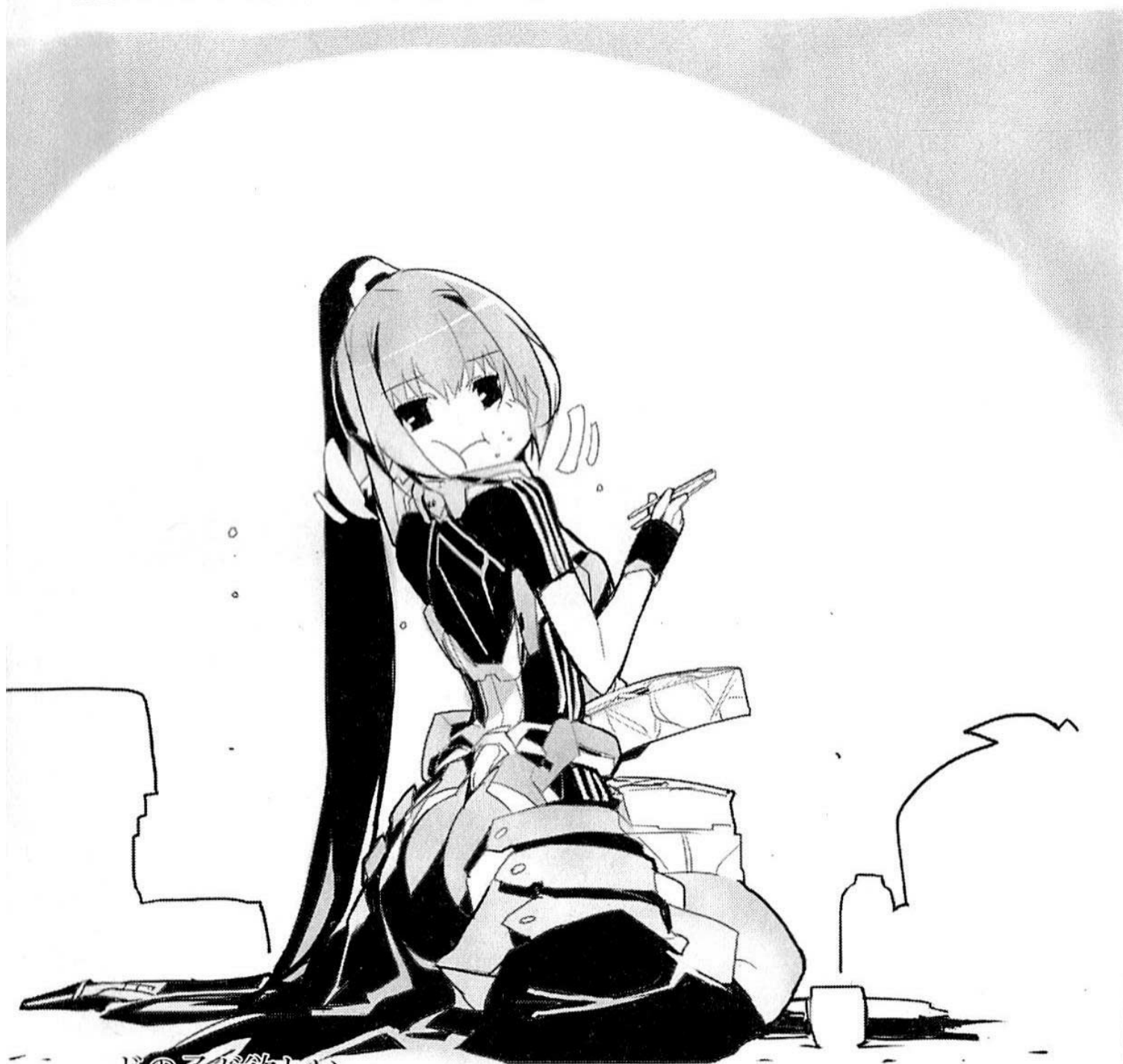
“Honda Tadakatsu’s daughter. You will marry my son, Sanada Nobuyuki.”

It was Futayo.

Chapter 29: Courter at an Unexpected Meeting

第二十九章

『突発会議場の求愛者』



どの子が欲しい
あの子に決めた
配点（無理すぎる）

Which girl do you want?

I have decided on that girl.

Point Allocation (That's Definitely Not Happening)

...Oh?

Horizon looked to Futayo.

Similarly, Kimi behind her, Asama and Mitotsudaira next to her, and the others around her...

"Um."

They all looked to Futayo who was entirely focused on eating.

She was eating an Asama Shrine kudzu leaf meal called Leafstyle and a large yakiniku meal abbreviated as the Large Yak from Mitotsudaira's restaurant. The Blue Thunder and others had prepared enough for everyone present and more, but the manager had contacted them earlier and said the Blue Thunder's food was not going to be ready in time.

...I have determined that is a slight disappointment.

At any rate, Futayo was tilting her head back to stuff more of the Leafstyle's boiled leaves in her mouth. Then she kept her head tilted back as she poured the tea from the Large Yak in her mouth instead of the sake that came with the Leafstyle.

She used the drink to help swallow the boiled leaves.

"Ngah."

With a sound halfway between a voice and a sigh, she faced forward and toward Horizon. Then...

"Do not worry. There is enough for everyone."

"No, Futayo-sama, that is not the issue." Horizon nodded. "I have some bad news and some unimportant news for you."

"Then give them in order."

“She sure is decisive...” commented a few people, but Horizon ignored it.

She sat down and spoke to Futayo.

“Futayo-sama...it seems the food from the Blue Thunder will not arrive.”

“My god...”

The empty container and the chopsticks slipped from Futayo’s hands.

Her mouth fell slightly open and her eyebrows wrinkled somewhat as she looked to Horizon. But...

“Unfortunately, this is reality,” said the automaton princess.

“...How unfortunate indeed.”

Futayo groaned, turned around, and ran off.

Horizon and the others watched her leave. And after the span of a few breaths, Masazumi spoke up.

“Um, hey.”

“No, it is fine, Masazumi-sama. ...Uh, Futayo-sama, I secretly brought your serving along with me.”

Horizon pulled a Blue Thunder paper bag from behind her back and waved it around. Futayo returned at full speed. Her feet screeched along the deck as she came to a stop and she fell to her knees.

“If it is a gift from you, Horizon-sama, I will eat it first!”

Futayo took the Blue Thunder paper bag and Horizon said “judge” and nodded a few times. Then Horizon spoke to the girl who was already splitting the baguette and making an extra-thick ham sandwich.

“As promised, I will now give you the unimportant news.”

“Judge. What is it, Horizon-sama?”

“Judge. Someone is saying they wish to wed Honda Tadakatsu-sama’s daughter in accordance with the Testament descriptions. ...That’s them over there.”

Futayo looked in the direction she indicated.

Sanada Masayuki and Nobuyuki were there. Futayo viewed the two of them while chewing, but she finally audibly swallowed. And...

“Both of them do?”

“Papa! Were you planning on sharing my wife!?”

“Nobuyuki! How dare you be jealous of your father! Have you no shame!?”

“At least deny the accusation,” everyone muttered as Futayo tilted her head.

“So who do they want to wed?”

“Eh?” said Nobuyuki as his head fell forward. He seemed to be somewhat surprised, but he pointed at the Musashi group after a few moments.

His finger was clearly pointed at Futayo and Futayo looked at herself and then behind her.

“You were planning on inheriting my father’s daughter’s name...Hassan-dono?”

Hassan silently stepped to the right, revealing...

“Oh, it was Ohiroshiki-dono.”

“Eh!? Wh-what!? I-I was only checking my religion’s doctrines on the divine network! I certainly wasn’t doing anything wrong!”

“Ohiroshiki-sama.” Horizon gestured toward Nobuyuki. “He seems to wish to make you his wife.”

“Eh?”

Horizon saw Ohiroshiki look to Nobuyuki. His eyes moved from the man’s feet up to his head.

“Y-you dare imply that is less than 10 years old!? Besides, who decided on this!?”

“The Testament.”

“The Testament!?”

“Yes, it was written in the Testament,” declared Horizon. “As it is part of the

history recreation, Ohiroshiki-sama, you must become his wife. Now, you have two options: think of him as less than 10 and marry him, or ask Masazumi-sama or Toori-sama to rescue you. But you will not actually be lost if you are taken as his wife, so I must warn you that our Far Eastern forces will not be very motivated this time.”

“P-please save me! Flat Honda-kun!”

“You think I’ll save you when you call me that!?”

“W-wait!”

Someone interrupted. It was Sanada Nobuyuki. He was blushing and pointing at Ohiroshiki.

“I-I refuse!!”

“Too bad, Nobuyuki-sama. Ohiroshiki-sama refused first,” resolutely stated Horizon. “We win this round.”

“W-wait!”

“If we wait, then we win the second round, so are you sure you want that?”

“What kind of rules are those!?”

“The world of politics is cruel.”

Horizon opened a sign frame to check the time. She counted to 5, and...

“I waited 5 seconds. ...We win the second round.”

Gold Mar: “Aren’t these rules actually extremely simple?”

Mal-Ga: “Yes. I thought that too last time.”

Vice President: “Aren’t any of you going to stop her?”

Almost Everyone: “Say that into a mirror!!”

Horizon saw Nobuyuki sweat bullets and shake his head.

“N-no, wait!”

“You pointed at Ohiroshiki-sama earlier. Are you saying you wish to defy the Testament?” she said. “The Testament is frightening. After all, if it names you, you must die. If it tells you to get married, you must do so. Of course, you can always die or marry without it telling you to.”

Sanyou had stepped out of the entranceway with some guest tea in hand, but she immediately stepped back inside and closed the door. Asama shouted over at her.

“Ah, Sanyou-sensei! Please at least leave the tea!”

“Tomo! Tomo! You’re really on fire today, aren’t you!?”

This place always has such a nice atmosphere, thought Horizon before speaking to Nobuyuki.

“Now, marry Ohiroshiki-sama.”

“D-do I have no rights here!?” asked Ohiroshiki.

“Th-that’s right, Musashi’s princess! Y-you need to respect his rights!”

“...I *need* to?”

“Please respect his rights!”

“Judge.” Horizon nodded several times. “Once you two are married, I will personally monitor the situation to ensure he is not a victim of rights-ignoring abuse.”

Nobuyuki’s face passed red and turned purple.

“We win the third round,” said Horizon.

“W-wait! I was pointing to the person in front of him!”

“Oh, so it was Hassan-sama.”

Hassan shrugged.

“I want to eat curry to forget all about this.”

Indeed, thought Horizon. And...

“Understood. There seems to have been a misunderstanding.”

“S-so you’ve finally gotten it into your thick hea-...I mean, you’ve finally been

so kind as to understand!?”

“Judge,” concluded Horizon. “I have it all figured out: Hassan-sama, have some curry. Nobuyuki-sama, marry Ohiroshiki-sama and let the guards monitor you.”

“Listen to meeeeeeee!!”

“She demoted him to the guards!” everyone shouted, but Horizon tilted her head.

“You leave me no choice. Could you explain this in a simpler fashion?”

Nobuyuki fell to his knees and spent half a minute or so regulating his breathing.

“U-um!”

Once he recovered, he pointed at Futayo who was reaching for her second croquette.

“I will marry that girl, Honda Futayo, as Honda Tadakatsu’s daughter!”

“Futayo-sama? Do you have anything to say about this?”

“Eh?” Futayo looked back and forth and then tilted her head again.

“Unfortunately, I intend to inherit my father Tadakatsu’s name. I no longer feel like Tadakatsu’s daughter. I am more like an almost-Tadakatsu, so that would not work.”

“Wait!”

Nobuyuki shouted that word for the umpteenth time today.

...Wh-what is the meaning of this!?

He did not understand. It was all so crazy. Besides...

...The daughter will become the father!?

“Papa!? What is this!?”

“Don’t let it get to you, Nobuyuki!”

“Papa! Can we solve this if I don’t let it get to me!?”

“Yes! We can come up with a good idea if you don’t let it get to you! ...And you, girl!”

His father pointed at the Honda girl who was eating some bread with vegetables and cheese between it.

“You say you intend to inherit the name of Lord Tadakatsu the Peerless in the East!? If that is why you are rejecting Nobuyuki’s marriage request, then first prove you are stronger than him!”

“Huh? So you want a duel?”

She stood up.

Seeing her casual stance, Nobuyuki took a defensive stance.

...What is this?

The title of Musashi Vice Chancellor isn’t just for show, thought Nobuyuki.

She was only standing there, but he sensed a presence that felt like an attack coming from somewhere...no, coming from everywhere. And he was overwhelmed by a desire to flee.

...Sh-she’s good!

But, he thought.

...I am Sanada’s Chancellor and President!

He knew ninja techniques and was trained in sword fighting. In a limited head-on battle, he was confident he could hold his own against the Ten Braves.

“In that case...”

Sanada Nobuyuki lowered his hips in a combat stance. He held his left arm out front and slightly raised, he reached his right arm toward the sword at his hip, and he leaned his body to the left.

“Let’s do this!”

A careless horizontal swing of the enemy’s spear caught him in the jaw from the left.

Unturning: “Oh, I didn’t know humans could make that noise.”

Flat Vassal: “Yeah, it sounded like it had to come from something else!”

Silver Wolf: “Also, he’s kind of flying away.”

Asama: “Oh, no. What do I do? He didn’t go through the immigration process, so he doesn’t have a contract and I can’t use any definite healing spells. ... Masazumi, quit playing with Tsukinowa. Hey.”

“Hm,” said Futayo as she focused on the tactile feedback.

She had quickly reversed her grip on the spear and swung the bottom end. She had made it look like the attack would come from the right and then instantly switched to an attack from the left.

...To do that while standing requires anchoring your feet to the ground.

She was only able to pull this off after learning to create an axis line for her strength.

...I am gradually growing closer to my father’s level.

Meanwhile, Nobuyuki had been knocked away.

“D-...!”

He got up with his hand on his cheek.

“D-damn you! That was a surprise attack! Th-this isn’t over yet!”

She immediately hit him from the right.

Scarred: “Huh? It sounded different that time, didn’t it?”

10ZO: “Mary-dono, you don’t mind watching something like this?”

Scarred: “Eh? But when someone is demonstrating their resolve, you have to watch it through to the end. I see no meaning in feeling displeasure or disgust

over something like that.”

10ZO: “Judge. I agree.”

Asama: “What!? What is this atmosphere!?”

Wise Sister: “You don’t know, Asama!? That lovey-dovey couple is using this to rise to their next stage! At the final stage, the air grows too thick to breathe! Here, use this oxygen mask! There’s one for you too, Mitotsudaira!”

Silver Wolf: “Why are you pushing up your breasts!?”

Flat Vassal: “Oh, it happened a third time.”

Masazumi watched Sanada’s Chancellor roll along the deck a third time.

He stopped while sprawled out on his back. Even an amateur like her could tell he was taking direct hits.

...Doesn’t that hurt?

Was this a sign of his pride, or was it something else? Whatever it was, Sanada’s Chancellor looked discouraged. He sat up while crying and with blood dripping from his mouth and nose.

“Papa! Papa! I can’t do it!! There’s no way I can win!”

“Argh! How weak-willed are you!? And you call yourself Sanada’s Chancellor and President!?”

With that final comment, Sanada’s Chancellor hopped to his feet.

Ohh, thought Masazumi as she grabbed Tsukinowa’s front paws and made the anteater dance.

...That brought back his motivation.

A fourth sound rang out.

Futayo thought:

...The Sanada Chancellor uses some odd combat techniques.

He left himself wide open and let her hit him.

That was all.

She wondered if he had strong defenses and was trying to wear her out, but that was not the case. She could feel the blows reaching his bones.

She wondered if he had some kind of plan, but after she sent him flying a fourth time, that seemed unlikely.

No matter how I look at it, his fighting is entirely devoid of technique, she thought. He was the leader of a nation, making this a duel against a Chancellor and Student Council President. This had to be some kind of plan.

...But is there any strategic value to this method?

She was inexperienced, but could she come up with anything here?

“————”

She could.

“Glasses boy! Is there anything to this!?”

“It isn’t often you see someone rely on others to that extent, Spear Honda-kun!”

He praised me. Then I need take pride in this.

“Judge. ...Because thinking is a pain!”

“Don’t say that so loudly...” someone muttered, but she did not mind. The Secretary would answer her either way. As usual, he pushed his glasses up his nose first.

“This is...yes. Sanada’s Chancellor might be doing this to demonstrate that he will not lay a hand on you. He might be filling you with doubt, wondering why he won’t lay a hand on you.”

Four Eyes: “Did you hit your head? How about looking at reality every once in a while?”

That conflicting opinion has helped balance things out.

But, thought Futayo.

...This is about whether or not I question his actions?

Futayo started by questioning herself and quickly reached her conclusion: “Thinking really is a pain.”

She could move her body though, so she hit him a fifth time as he got up.

This is just about over, thought Masazumi as she reached for Tsukinowa who was on the floor.

Tsukinowa was always on her shoulder, so he was still not used to the floor. She hoped to teach him how to walk on the floor so she could eventually go on walks with him. But for the moment...

“Okay, we have work to do, Tsukinowa.”

The quick rest and bit of fun seemed to have rid Tsukinowa of his sleepiness. So once on her shoulder...

“Maa.”

“Good, good.” Masazumi rubbed his head and turned to face Sanada’s Chancellor.

“I-I can’t! Papa! If I keep this up, something inside me is going to break!”

“Argh! You sound like a delusional middle schooler! And you call yourself Sanada’s leader!?”

But his father’s scolding did not work a second time. He only continued weeping.

“D-dammit! And I thought I could get a wife in this new land and make a comeback!”

Gold Mar: “Yeah. Guys have a way of including other people in their schedules without asking.”

Mal-Ga: “Well, girls have a way of including other people in their own worlds.”

Flat Vassal: “Yeah, that’s how doujinshis are made, isn’t it?”

Righteousness: “You people don’t hesitate to take swipes at each other, do you?”

Masazumi could not agree more.

But then Futayo sighed and Sanada’s Chancellor got down on his knees.

“Papa! I’ve had enough! I’ll live alone!”

“Argh! How can you say that after inheriting the name of Sanada Nobuyuki!? And you call yourself a man!?”

Futayo tilted her head at the Sanada father’s words.

“I intend to inherit the name of my father, Tadakatsu. Thus, I cannot marry you as Tadakatsu’s daughter, but if you do want to marry me, you just have to inherit the name of Tadakatsu’s wife.”

Asama: “I’m sorry. I’m not quite sure what she means there...”

That was hardly uncommon.

But then Sanada’s Chancellor gasped and turned toward his father.

“Th-that makes sense! Papa! I’m going to give up on being a man and become a woman!”

“Damn you!!”

Sticky King: “I think he would have trouble being a woman too...”

Marube-ya: “Eh? What are you talking about, Nenji! Being a woman is super useful! If your negotiations aren’t going well, you just have to scream and shout ‘molester’!”

Almost Everyone: “That’s blackmail, not a negotiation!”

We’ll have to establish a cutoff point when they’re arrested, carelessly thought Masazumi.

Then she asked Futayo a question.

“You’re not really thinking about getting married, right?”

“Judge. I have my hands full simply inheriting my father’s name. It would probably take some training for someone to become my mother or Kazuno-

sama, but the Far East has bigger things to worry about right now. ...Besides, even if marriage interviews are an option, it would probably be best if it was someone I already knew.”

“Then,” said Naruze as she wrote something on her crop mark frame Magie Figur. “If you were choosing someone from our class, who would it be?”

“Well,” said Futayo as she looked around and spotted the Tachibana Wife using her false arms to shield her husband.

Girls: “Ohhh...”

Next to Tenzou, Mary only said “oh, my” and held her hands to her cheeks. Narumi and Urquiaga silently ate their portable combat food.

Everyone responds differently, thought Masazumi before Futayo nodded.

“I am not worthy of Kimi-dono, so, well, if I had to choose...I suppose it would be Masazumi.”

Adele and everyone else took a step away from Masazumi.

Kimi played a mellow song from a sign frame while singing “Chalala~ Chala, lalalala, chalala~” and wiggling her hips, but Masazumi still turned back toward them all.

Vice President: “W-wait! What is that distance for!?”

Naruze and Naito pulled a long table and chairs from somewhere and sat down.

Naruze rested her elbow on the table and pointed at Masazumi with her pen.

“This is some top-tier material. You need to let me know what’s going on here.”

“And Asama-chi, how would this work?”

“Hmm, they’re both from Mikawa, so the contract situation might actually work out surprisingly well.”

Our class really doesn’t hold back at times like this, thought Adele as Futayo asked Masazumi a question.

“Masazumi, do you dislike me?”

“N-no, it isn’t that.”

Everyone immediately looked toward a certain person: Horizon.

Horizon opened a sign frame with the Blue Thunder mark on it and then faced the Sanada pair.

“Another case closed!”

“Horizon! Horizon! The Testament says that’s supposed to be my catch phrase!?”

“My apologies, Mitotsudaira-sama. But I thought I needed to say it until you historically began saying it, and I finally managed to do so here.”

Does that make it okay? wondered Adele as she looked to the Sanada group.

“Um, what do you have to say?” she asked.

“Kh...”

Nobuyuki faced Masazumi and took a combat stance.

“M-Musashi Vice President! I challenge you...!”

“Ah,” said Adele. “This could be dangerous.”

He was hit a sixth time.

Asama saw Futayo stand in front of Masazumi and speak in a dignified tone.

“You! Keep your hands off my wife!”

“Papa! Papa! I have no idea what’s going on anymore!”

Asama could not agree more, but she felt no sympathy whatsoever. Was that because she was on Musashi’s side?

...Umm, how is Masazumi?

Their Vice President had completely frozen and was not moving.

Meanwhile, Horizon had joined Naruze and Naito at the long table.

“Now, I am worried about Masazumi-sama’s decision.”

“Yes. If she makes the wrong decision here, it will really mess with our schedule.”

As the Technohexen agreed with Horizon, Futayo turned back toward Masazumi and asked a question.

“Masazumi, are you okay?”

“...Eh?”

Masazumi came back to her senses and Futayo said more.

“Despite what I said, I already have a lot on my plate these days. I apologize if I got your hopes up.”

“Eh? O-oh! Don’t worry, don’t worry! You didn’t get my hopes up and, um, we can put this on hold, okay?”

“O-of course you will!” someone shouted.

It was Sanada Masayuki. The veins were bulging from his temples as he pointed at Futayo and Masazumi.

“Two girls!? You dare violate the Testament so flagrantly!?”

“I was thinking nothing of the sort,” insisted Futayo.

Silver Wolf: “I kind of think she was.”

Righteousness: “Huh? I thought your rules said she wins as long as she says it.”

But someone glared sharply at Masayuki when he mentioned “two girls”.

...That would be Naruze...

Could this end badly? wondered Asama when she saw how intensely Naruze was glaring at Sanada Masayuki. She spun her pen in her hand.

“You there. What was that about two girls?”

But before Masayuki could answer, someone stopped Naruze.

It was Kimi. She had been behind Asama earlier, but she had circled behind Naruze on the right.

“No! You mustn’t, Naruze! You mustn’t give in to your thoughts that are shouting, ‘No~, I want to be with Margot~ Smoochy, smoochy~’! Yes! Certainly not with these lips here!”

“H-hey! Please don’t egg her on, Kimi! And Naruze, don’t let that moron get to you! Let’s calm down, okay!?”

When Asama worked at a smile and looked back, she saw Naruze hanging her head, opening her eyes wide, and sweating.

Asama: “Kimiiii!”

Wise Sister: “Eh? What?”

She was not listening. But Naruze did slowly lower her hips back into her chair.

“Okay, fine. So you refuse to accept two girls, do you?”

“Um, Naruze?”

Naruze ignored Asama and the Weiss Hexen raised her pen.

“Sanada’s Principal and Chancellor, I understand completely. ...You say it can’t be two girls?”

“Th-that’s right! Marriage opportunity must be equal!”

Wouldn’t that mean two girls would be fine?

But Naruze simply nodded deeply a few times. And she stated her conclusion.

“Then I can only assume you’re okay with two guys.”

Almost Everyone: “Calm down!!”

“Shut up, all of you!”

Naruze pointed her pen at the Sanada pair.

“I made you into a doujinshi.”

She used the past tense.

“Hey! Guericke! What is this!? Your printing factory in the city is running at

full capacity! Why are you running your business at night!?”

“Don’t be silly, Tomoe Gozen! This is nothing unusual! We received a request for a father-son forbidden love manga with a promise that they would use Hemisphere Printing exclusively for the summer event!”

“That’s plenty unusual!”

Asama saw Naruze sigh and sit down.

Asama: “Just out of curiosity, when did you draw that?”

Mal-Ga: “Eh? Oh, I was bored when they got here, so I drew it up. With them tripping, falling on their back, kneeling, and falling to all fours, I managed to snap some reference photos. And since the storyboard is important for this kind, I kept them mostly naked in the drawings.”

Is that how it works? She really is the master, thought Asama.

“Ah,” said Naito as she checked Naruze’s Magie Figur. “Ga-chan, I wasn’t doing my job, so look. You missed censoring it here.”

She held it out toward everyone while saying “See? See?”, so Asama quickly covered Suzu and Mary’s eyes.

“Y-you mustn’t look at this! If you do, you’ll fall in the Musashi caste system!”

“That’s right,” said Itoken. He glanced at the Magie Figur and nodded. “You mustn’t look at this, everyone! Everyone’s is different! And we wouldn’t want them feeling inadequate!”

“You’re not helping!”

As everyone shouted their *tsukkomi*, Masazumi sighed and tilted her head.

“That will get banned, you know?”

“Heh. Don’t be silly, Masazumi. We’ll censor it on site. Obviously.” Naruze sounded entirely disinterested. “Of course, I get the feeling we’ll forget to censor a few which will find their way out into the world. You will forever rue the day you made an enemy of Musashi’s Weiss Hexen.”

“Wait!!”

Both Sanada's shouted the word this time, so Masazumi held out a hand, said "wait, I guess", and stood up. She looked to Mitotsudaira and Horizon was the first to react.

Horizon left her chair and held a sign frame displaying the Blue Thunder mark to Mitotsudaira's right. And...

Almost Everyone: "C'mon!"

Silver Wolf: "Eh!? Ehhh!?"

Masazumi and Kimi told her "Now! Do it now!" via eye contact.

Mitotsudaira finally lowered her shoulders in exasperation and breathed in.

"Another case closed!"

Everyone responded in accordance with the Testament.

"Yes, sir...!"

They bowed down toward Mitotsudaira.

Llaf: "Oh? It seems Musashi and Sanada have reached some kind of conclusion. ...Kiyo-dono?"

Kiyo-Massive: "Eh? Oh, s-sorry. Nagayasu-sama is a bit upset."

Tsurugi: "I-I am not upset! I'm just worried because Katagiri-kun won't open a line with me!"

Katagiri had long felt some kind of "weight" in his chest, but now he felt it fading away.

...How can I be more aware of what it means to be a guy?

"You're right." He nodded to the Asama shrine maiden. "Because I was focusing on it so much, I was pursuing the ideal instead of focusing on my current situation. There is a lot I lack, but that's just the way things are, so I think I'll start by making up for the things I really need."

"Hee hee. Yes, make steady progress and don't rush things. ...Everyone feels

the same way, but we all start rushing things because we feel like we're under pressure to pull ourselves together. You need to watch out for that."

"Testament...!"

Katagiri agreed wholeheartedly and bowed.

On the *lernen figur* the shrine maiden smiled and waved.

When Katagiri smiled back, the shrine maiden leaned over.

She pushed up her breasts and moved her lips toward the screen while they shined with pink lipstick.

A light sticky kissing sound followed.

...Ah.

This was nothing. He saw lips and boobs all the time. And with boobs, he could even see bare ones in the ship's bath. But...

"———"

Katagiri felt his heart pound extra hard in his chest.

For no reason, he felt his face grow warm as the shrine maiden pulled back from the screen.

...Wah.

He was worried she would notice his reaction, but that only made him blush more. So to distract her as she waved again...

"U-um, what's your name...!?"

She laughed, but then moved off the right side of the *lernen figur*. And then the *lernen figur* closed.

"Ah...!"

He reflexively reached out toward the vanished image and his hand clawed at empty air.

Katagiri grabbed at nothing with his hand.

"Kh..."

And he pressed that hand to his chest.

...Huh?

This isn't good.

"My pulse hasn't settled down... D-did I eat something weird?"

Tsurugi: "Katagiri-kun!"

He trembled at the voice he heard from the *lernen figur*.

Tsurugi: "We have a request for you to continue the meeting!"

Oh, no, thought Katagiri.

If the meeting was with that shrine maiden...

...Wh-what do I do?

Just imagining it caused him to sweat like he was being steamed.

Tsurugi: "Um, Katagiri-kun!? You seem extremely nervous..."

□□凸: "Eh!? Y-you can tell!?"

Tsurugi: "Oh, yes. I'm monitoring your physical state, so I can see all the endorphins pumping through your brain. ...This tends to happen at night once every three days, doesn't it?"

□□凸: "Give me back my rights as a human being! Please stop this!"

But to distract himself, Katagiri instructed the PR Committee to open a *lernen figur*.

He would resume the meeting. But...

...U-um.

Would that shrine maiden appear again?

What if she did? She had just waved goodbye, so if he showed up again so soon, would she laugh at him? But if she did...

"Okay! As Musashi's Student Council President and Chancellor, I think it's high time I gave Hashiba's Ten Spears a good groping!"

The *lernen figur* displayed a nudist pretending to grope something like a rod.

“Dammiiiiit!”

As Yoshiyasu left the medical room and arrived on the bridge in front of the academy, she heard a voice and saw motion.

A sign frame showed Katagiri of the Ten Spears putting his full body weight behind his arms as he beat on the screen.

...That boy is quite emotional.

But she also saw the idiot wiggling his hips back and forth until Musashi’s Vice President kicked him out of the way. The Vice President ignored the nudist as he rolled away and she spoke to Katagiri.

“Katagiri! State your position! If you lack the appropriate authority, this entire meeting might not be possible!”

“...Testament!”

Katagiri got up, put his headphones back on, and fixed his collar.

“I am M.H.R.R. PR Committee Foreign Relations Chief Katagiri Katsumoto! I request a continuation of the meeting with Musashi’s Vice President!”

That title sounded like trouble to Yoshiyasu.

...A PR role!?

Generally, only a Committee Head, Special Duty Officer, or higher had the authority to directly speak with a Vice President.

Lower than that, the custom was to get confirmation from their superior first. But...

Righteousness: “A foreign relations official can take independent action when it comes to receiving information from a foreign nation. So he can convey a message from another nation’s higher officers without going through a Committee Head.”

Wise Sister: “I think Flat Girl here is more useful than a certain nerd I could mention.”

Novice: “W-well, excuse me! My specialties are strategy and history!”

Be quiet. Or rather, I’m not done yet.

Then someone asked the perfect segue question.

Sticky King: “A PR official... But even with that position, can’t Masazumi shutdown all discussions even if there is a rank discrepancy?”

Righteousness: “Not this time.”

Yoshiyasu looked to Musashi’s Vice President who had clenched her right hand in preparation to make her decision.

Righteousness: “Katagiri took over in Hashiba’s place. That means he is a PR Chief acting as M.H.R.R. Vice President Hashiba’s replacement. So...”

“Understood.”

Musashi’s Vice President raised her right forearm.

And she spoke.

“I see M.H.R.R. as the current Testament Union representative. So let us continue discussions with their agent.”

Chapter 30: Advice Giver in an Inexhaustible Place

第三十章

『無尽場の忠告者』



答えて御覧と
言われてみても
器の満ち引き定まらず
配点 (レベルアップ)

Even if you ask

For an answer

Your level of fulfillment will never settle down

Point Allocation (Level Up)

Katagiri breathed a heavy sigh.

...Their Vice President, huh?

He would have been more comfortable with that shrine maiden, but he still would have been discussing their position as a nation. He could not relax either way.

So he refocused his mind on a certain thought:

“I need to act the same no matter who I’m up against!”

Unturning: “Eh? What was that statement of conviction for?”

Gold Mar: “If anything, I think it just slipped out.”

10ZO: “I know what that’s like! I know exactly what it’s like to screw up like that!”

Vice President: “Hm, sounds kind of like an *amateur* trying to act like a *mature* negotiator...”

Almost Everyone: “...”

Vice President: “C’mon, everyone. There’s no need to hold in your laughter just because we’re holding negotiations.”

Asama: “Horizon! Horizon! You don’t have to force a reaction!”

Wise Sister: “Heh heh heh. Regardless, it really does sound like we’re up against a diplomacy amateur! Let’s show him how it’s done by shoving our opinion right on in there! It’s insertion tiiiiime!”

Bell: “Ah, i-it looks like...he’s saying...something.”

Katagiri pointed at his opponent though the *lernen figur*.

And he made his announcement:

"I will say it again! Musashi Ariadust Academy must return to its proper duties as students!"

"Then I have something to say too: we are already working on that."

"And what progress have you made?"

"Well," said Musashi's Vice President. "Starting tomorrow, we will hold the physical examination, strength testing, and health check that have to be redone thanks to the Battle of Mikawa. Um, and what else was there?"

A dancer raised both hands behind her.

"The festival!"

Oddly, that seemed to be enough for the Vice President who nodded and looked to Katagiri.

"The final exams."

"Ahhn! What is wrong with you, Masazumi!? Why do you have to ruin my good, old-fashioned escapism with that cold-hearted answer!?"

Next to the idiot sister, Mitotsudaira saw Masazumi, who kept her back turned to them, pass Tsukinowa a sign frame rolled into a cylinder.

Tsukinowa then turned back toward them and unfurled the sign frame like a hanging scroll: "Pipe down."

"You're mean! You're mean, you unfunny politician! Hey, foolish brother! My nails have grown a little long, so come file them down to comfort this fickle dancer! Here!"

"What are you making my king do!?"

"Now, now," said the nudist as he took his sister's right hand as she sat in a chair and held it out toward him. "Oh, you wanna do it too, Horizon?"

Horizon looked down at her hand and then frowned.

“Mh.”

The nails suddenly grew by about a centimeter and everyone cried out in surprise.

Horizon herself tilted her head but retracted her nails.

“I assume this is meant to allow nail art, but I did not realize I had this new function until you mentioned it.”

“But looking at the ends, it seems to be made from your biological parts. ... Foolish brother, do Horizon’s next.”

“Yeah, I probably should. And then...” The nudist turned back toward Mitotsudaira. “Nate, I’ll put nail polish on yours again, so get it ready, okay?”

“Eh?”

As Mitotsudaira grew flustered, Asama silently bumped into her shoulder.

She looked over in surprise, but Asama feigned innocence.

...I-is she getting back at me for everything that’s been happening lately!?

But Mitotsudaira was more amused at the idea of Asama doing this than she was annoyed. So she spoke up while removing her gloves.

“Yes, I do need to take care of my nails. After all, if we’re doing the school events,” she made sure her voice reached Masazumi, “we’ll have to do the Gagaku Festival. We usually do it at Aki, but we couldn’t this time. Right, Masazumi? And we were scheduled to perform.”

Mitotsudaira’s comment from behind inspired a thought in Masazumi’s heart.

...Please don’t add to the list of events!!

She had personally wanted to end it after dealing with the final exams.

The Gagaku Festival was originally meant to signal the end of the Spring School Festival. Which meant...

...We’ll have to do something on the level of the Spring School Festival!

Exams and the physical examination were school events, but since they were obligations, they were simple enough to have everyone do. But a festival was different. It required a lot of planning and personnel. Plus...

Laborer: “Festival preparations in the middle of exams? Do you have a death wish...?”

Smoking Girl: “If anything, I think she’s trying to kill us.”

Me: “Hey, hey, Seijun! Since we have to, let’s enjoy it!”

Vice President: “How am I supposed to respond to despair, resentment, and hope in such quick succession!?”

But a hint to a solution arrived without warning.

Flat Vassal: “Couldn’t we do them all in a row and finish it all off with the Gagaku Festival? Maybe?”

That’s it! thought Masazumi.

“We hold final exams in the mornings, do the physical examination and strength testing in the afternoons, and hold the Gagaku Festival on the final day!”

“Heh heh. Scheduling politician, who is going to arrange for all this?”

Vice President: “Ookubo, you instruct the Festival Committee and whoever else.”

Nagaya-Stable: “Eh?”

Masazumi instructed Tsukinowa to send all the protests from Ookubo into the divine transmission “on hold” box. Tsukinowa folded up the rapidly arriving sign frames so they vanished into thin air, but Masazumi felt a little bad for doing this to Ookubo. *Being an underclassman can’t be fun.*

But anyway, she thought.

“We will name this series of events the Musashi Ariadust Academy Event Festival and complete them in a concentrated fashion. That shouldn’t be a problem.”

Katagiri shook his head.

“There is a problem.” He pointed at her. “Musashi Ariadust Academy completed its testing for the school trip around the time of the Sack of Magdeburg. So why does your list of events not include a school trip? Aren’t you hiding that long-term event so you can return to waging war as soon as possible!?”

Novice: “He’s exactly right about that, so there’s not much we can say.”

Smoking Girl: “Well, Masazumi’s driving force is her desire for war, so there’s not much we can do about it.”

Uqui: “So our steady advance through war is finally at an end...”

Vice President: “Wait! Wait! I really wish I could take the time to answer you each separately!”

Katagiri gave a mental nod of pride after making his point.

...I actually did my research!

He had used the Testament Union to check with the Teacher’s Union.

It was normally not possible to get information on other schools, but the long-term movement of a school trip was a special case. If they did not make their plans known in advance, they might find the location for their events were already booked.

To bring that sort of problem to light, M.H.R.R. had gone back and measured Musashi’s activity immediately after the Sack of Magdeburg.

And that had led to this meeting.

...Musashi cannot escape!

So, thought Katagiri.

“A school trip lasts 5 days to a week, so if you add that to that Event Festival of yours,” he said, “Musashi will enter summer break. ...Now, follow that plan. And once you have fulfilled your duties as students, I hope you can enjoy your summer break to its fullest.”

Mal-Ga: “Without any war, I wonder how many doujinshi I can draw for the event... Oh, or should I use the sales to go on a trip?”

Gold Mar: “Oh? Ga-chan, are you the type to take a bright view of the future?”

Vice President: “I’m definitely taking a dim view of the future right now...”

Silver Wolf: “U-um, couldn’t we do that Event Festival while we have our school trip?”

Musashi: “I took the liberty of calculating out that suggestion just now. It is true Musashi alone will move to the destination for the school trip. And I believe it would be more efficient to use the Musashi to ‘sightsee’ at the destination while holding the final exams and various examinations and tests inside. Over.”

Me: “Won’t that make it something like a prison ship?”

Uqui: “Taking final exams with a scenic location visible out the window is quite the new form of torture.”

Hori-ko: “Calm down, everyone. We have two options:

“1. Accept a peaceful and enjoyable summer break devoid of war.

“2. Take our final exams inside a colossal aerial prison ship with nothing but war to look forward to afterwards.

“Now, we all know which one to choose, don’t we?”

Asama: “Um, Horizon? Aren’t you guiding us towards one of those?”

What are we supposed to do about this? thought Masazumi.

...To think school events would be the biggest barrier to world domination...

But when she thought about it, the current world was made up of schools. In a way, school was their greatest enemy, so this actually seemed right.

That said, there had to be a way out of this.

Vice President: “There should be a way to adjust the length of the events or the school trip to make one or the other shorter and provide a gap in the overall progress. That would reduce the burden on everyone.”

Unturning: “Who will make those calculations?”

Vice President: “Judge. That would be the Festival Committee.”

Marube-ya: “And who will ask the Festival Committee to do that?”

Vice President: “...Ah.”

Kanou watched Ookubo inside the tea house they had entered to take a break.

“Milady, the Vice President wants you to see if the Festival Committee can adjust the number of days.”

“How many times has she asked?”

Ookubo did not even glance at the anmitsu she was served and hung her head as she worked at the many sign frames that kept appearing. Seeing that, Kanou quietly answered.

“This was the 1st time.”

“I’ll do it right away, but wait until the 5th time before you answer.”

“Milady, humanity is very complex, isn’t it?”

“It is,” agreed Ookubo while glaring at her. “Or it’s become that way lately.”

Kanou saw several sign frames appear by her hands.

“Milady. ...The anteater is sending divine mails at a rate of 7 per second.”

Ookubo groaned and looked up at her, so Kanou held them up to show her. Sign frames bearing an anteater icon rapidly stacked up on her raised palm.

“W-wait, what is that!?”

“Most likely, the Vice President is unfamiliar with sending divine mails, so she asked her Mouse to ‘send messages periodically’. And the Mouse is similarly unfamiliar with them, so it ended up like this. ...The task is not taking up too

much space, but I have determined the real problem is not knowing how long this will last.”

“Knh...”

“Milady.” Kanou nodded. “They have passed the 5th time, so leave the response to me. You can take a break while dealing with the work in front of you.”

Kanou then gestured toward the anmitsu.

“You may start with that.”

Ookubo’s response arrived:

“3.”

She must be pretty mad, thought Masazumi, but there was no helping that.

...Finishing the school trip in 3 days, huh?

That seemed impossible. Or rather, that did not seem like a proper school trip.

What were they to do about this?

And as she wondered that...

“Now. Once you complete your testing, please go on your school trip,” urged Katagiri.

Righteousness: “A normal academy would probably rejoice at that kind of scheduling.”

Obscene: “Yoshiyasu-kun! You make it sound like our academy isn’t normal!”

Sticky King: “That’s right. No matter how you slice it, we are perfectly normal and the model example of an academy.”

Flat Vassal: “Yeah... Lately, it’s starting to look like we try to force our values onto others, double down on our values when that fails, and then declare ourselves the winner.”

Vice President: “I haven’t gotten that bad yet...”

After saying that, Masazumi saw Katagiri giving her a sharp look from the sign frame.

...The testing we did at Magdeburg is being used as an alibi.

Horizon pulled out the collection box from the air behind her, but Masazumi pretended not to see it.

And then Katagiri continued the verbal attack.

“Musashi Ariadust Academy must submit your school trip schedule to the Far Eastern Teacher’s Union in IZUMO. Please do so-...”

Someone else cut in before he could say “as soon as possible”.

It was the Aoi Sister. She wore a sleeveless top with track suit tights below.

“Hold it right there! Wait! You’re waiting, aren’t you!? Yes, you waited! That’s perfect, little boy! Now let my question pass from your dick to your ears and then think carefully about it!”

The idiot sister suddenly spoke to Katagiri.

“Are you listening!? You’re being a terrible boy right now. Yes, quite a hopeless boy. Do you know what I mean? ...Okay, where’s your answer!? Well!?”

“Eh?”

Katagiri lowered his head.

...A terrible boy?

Had he done something wrong? They were enemies, so his actions were of course meant to benefit one side and harm the other. Was that why? But the girl gave a confident smile and said more.

“You don’t know!? Really!? Why not!? That would be because you aren’t thinking about it! C’mon, think about it! What am I asking!? The answer lies in the House of Hidden Treasures!^[1] You just need to open the door to the unknown: kupaaaaaaa!! Now, answer!”

“I have no idea what any of that means!”

“Oh, dear. You really are hopeless! You just have to make up your own meaning! Can you not think for yourself!?”

She pointed at him.

“Really, now. Your conversational partner just told you you’re a hopeless boy, but you said you can’t answer unless she specifies what she means. Do you know what that means?”

The dancer smiled.

“Silly boy. It means you’re engaging in diplomacy when you don’t even understand yourself.”

Katagiri gasped at what the dancer in the *lernen figur* was saying.

“You mean I need to realize how I’m negotiating badly?”

...There honestly isn’t any reason to go along with this game!

But he had his pride.

What would happen if an enemy asked him this and he was unable to answer? He was worried how the other nations would evaluate it.

He of course did not care if they judged him inexperienced and said he was only borrowing Hashiba’s authority.

But that could also sully Hashiba’s name.

...They’ll say an inexperienced negotiator was allowed to do whatever he wanted.

That necessitated a vainglorious negotiator and an overly proud superior. They could not have anyone saying that when they were attacking Hexagone Française.

“Kh...”

Katagiri groaned and thought, *I must answer the enemy’s question here.*

But the real problem existed before even that.

AnG: “Hey, Kacky, have you found the answer to that question?”

That was it.

The dancer had simply interrupted, so she had not actually given him a hint as to how he was being a bad negotiator. So...

□□凸: “U-umm, I can work backwards by picking out all the suspicious things she said...”

Kiyo-Massive: “It all seemed suspicious to me...”

He could not agree more. But Nagayasu had an answer:

Tsurugi: “Wouldn’t it be ‘House of Hidden Treasures’ and ‘kupaaaaaaaaa’?”

□□凸: “Eh? What do those mean?”

Tsurugi: “Eh? O-ohh! Nothing you need to know about, Katagiri-kun! Yes!”

Kimee: “You people never change, do you?”

“But,” said Fukushima.

Llaf: “Well, she is a user of the Giant Breasts Defense...”

□□凸: “What is that? Can Nagayasu-san and Kiyomasa-san use it?”

Llaf: “She is on a bit of a different level. Oh, but not with volume. I suspect it is a matter of quality. After all, she completely deflected my attack.”

Katagiri realized he was faced with a fearsome opponent.

AnG: “...Is Kacky done for here?”

Kimee: “That was faster than expected...”

□□凸: “D-don’t just decide that for me! Listen! You never know who’s going to win a negotiation until the end!”

I can’t rush this, he told himself. And...

“I must remember my original intent here.”

He decided to do exactly that.

Kimi realized Katagiri was looking at her.

...Oh, he sure has calmed down.

Asama had walked up next to her and she seemed to have noticed as well. She looked to Kimi and started to say something.

But Kimi groped her to stop her.

“Ah, y-you mustn’t seduce me when I’m in the middle of negotiating! I especially love the lack of bra! It shows your love of freedom!”

“Don’t say that in the middle of an international negotiation!”

Once she was done groping, Kimi turned back toward Katagiri.

“Hey, little boy. The thing here is, a single mistake will mean you’re ‘insufficient’. Are you sure you want that?”

“I don’t mind,” said Katagiri.

Kimi nodded once and said more while wondering how he would respond when she *put it like this*.

“Then listen up,” she said. “People might say that Hashiba has someone ‘insufficient’ working for her.”

What would he do when the person he cared for was affected by his actions?

He responded while placing a hand on his chest to show this was his problem and not Hashiba’s.

“Being insufficient seems much more proper for me than vainglory or pride.”

After all...

“If I am insufficient, I only need to give myself what I lack.”

“I see.” Kimi smiled and turned back toward Mitotsudaira. “You just have to give yourself what you lack.”

“I can do that!? Really!? Tomo! Is there a spell for that!?”

Asama covered her ears and looked away, but Kimi was fairly certain there was no such spell.

Anyway, she looked back toward Katagiri. And...

“Then I have this to say to you.” Kimi narrowed her eyes and wrapped her arms around her chest. “You should have *already seen* the answer regarding

what you're doing wrong."

Katagiri trembled at the Musashi dancer's words.

He felt a chill.

But it was not from fear. She had demonstrated more than he had imagined, so he felt...

...Awe...

Tsurugi: "K-Katagiri-kun! Are you okay!? You're responding like a dog pissing itself in fear! Did anything happen to you!? Did you lose anything!?"

□□凸: "Give back my rights as a human beiiiiing!!"

But he was filled with the dumbstruck feeling that always followed awe.

...She got me!

Katagiri realized his greatest weapon had been sealed away.

And just because she claimed he should already have seen the answer.

...I can't use the fact that I'm inexperienced and insufficient to say I don't know or to ask her to teach me!

Katagiri knew one won a negotiation by resolving it no matter what method they used.

So in the worst case, he could resolve the negotiation by bowing down and claiming to be inexperienced and insufficient.

That was his last resort.

...I was prepared to apologize for my inexperience, but...

But this opponent had forgiven his inexperience and then refused to accept it.

She had likely caught on to his strategy from the moment she had called him insufficient. She had realized he was setting the stage for his last resort of claiming inexperience or insufficiency.

And she had sealed it away.

He could no longer use his inexperience as a weapon. And...

Kuro-Take: “But formally speaking, this means you’re being protected by your opponent, Katagiri-kun.”

That was exactly right.

By preventing him from announcing his inexperience, he maintained his position as “not inexperienced”.

That meant he was not yet insufficient.

He did not know if this part had been intentional on her part.

Tsurugi: “B-but can’t we also look at it as her setting up a defensive line that prevents Katagiri-kun from turning the tables on her?”

Kuro-Take: “Does she look like someone who would do that?”

That was true enough. And he could practically hear the words hidden behind the dancer’s slight smile: ...*“Isn’t that great.”*

He did not know why, but he was confident she was saying that.

But those words held great meaning. After all, announcing his own inexperience would have repercussions for him eventually.

And now that he thought about it...

...Using my inexperience as a weapon is kind of cowardly, isn’t it?

Wise Sister: “Heh heh. What does our inexperienced novice think about this? Yes, you in the glasses!”

Four Eyes: “You don’t mean me, do you? ...I’d like to hear this too.”

Novice: “Heh. Calling yourself inexperienced or a novice is generally used to drive yourself to action. You need to tell yourself there’s something you have to do because of your inexperience. I see that as something you can use because you don’t know much about real work out in the field. But...”

Four Eyes: “You don’t have to hold it in.”

Novice: “Kh...!”

Four Eyes: “ ‘Kh...!’ What is that? Does it even mean anything?”

Novice: “I-it’s a joy you would never understand!”

Four Eyes: “I see you’re closing yourself up again. And you can just honestly say you like how it sounds. Calling it a ‘joy’ is a little odd if you ask me.”

Novice: “D-dammit...! And, um, as I was saying...”

Four Eyes: “You were saying that asking for guidance because of inexperience is a way of gaining the knowledge, training, and experience needed to increase your own skill. But that boy was trying to use the word ‘inexperience’ to get a hint for something that only applies to this one situation. ...That isn’t inexperience. It’s indiscretion brought on by inexperience.”

Laborer: “You two sure get along.”

Four Eyes: “...Thank you.”

Novice: “Whyyy!? Why would you think thaaaat!?”

Katagiri took a deep breath.

He used that to calm his heart and a thought occurred to him.

...This dancer...

She reminded him of the previous shrine maiden.

Was it their atmosphere? Their facial features? Their giant breasts? No.

...It isn’t that.

It was how they showed interest in him.

His position with the shrine maiden was the opposite of his position with the dancer.

Before, he had had trouble describing himself, so the shrine maiden had simply listened, prompted him, and repeated his words for confirmation.

She had used that to let him speak about himself.

And now this Musashi dancer was hiding herself as she asked a question.
Which meant...

...She's in the same position I was before.

Without realizing that, he had viewed her as a threat and tried to escape. And in so doing...

...She read 2 steps ahead and cut off my inexperience escape route.

That likely meant she had predicted what he would do and reached an understanding of him.

That was why she had inspired awe in him earlier.

Which meant...

“—————”

He had failed.

He had failed in these negotiations.

He had failed to accomplish anything and the one method he had desperately searched for had been predicted and used against him.

And he had also been saved from that very failure. After all, the dancer could have rejected him, but she had instead given him the greatest hint possible.

Yes, a hint.

“I should have already seen the answer, correct?”

That was what the dancer had said.

He doubted that had simply been a way to prevent him from claiming inexperience.

He had already seen the answer.

Yes, he thought. *She rejected my words but saved me.*

...This was essentially a defeat.

But, he also thought. I can make up for this.

He thought about the shrine maiden that had helped him change and given

him the mindset to begin that change.

...Will I be able to ask about her the next time we speak?

He was not sure what he would do with that information, but perhaps he just wanted to validate the person who validated him by listening to him.

But at the moment, he felt different from just a moment before. And that shrine maiden had given him the chance he needed to change the way he thought about negotiating.

There was no point in telling her he had grown. If he spoke now, she would realize that he was different from before.

Katagiri breathed in to reset his feelings and redo his failed negotiations.

And to do that, he thought.

"...It's something I've already seen."

"Now, then," said Horizon as she listened to Katagiri's muttered words with a box in her arms. "I am giving him an incredibly important hint there, but I wonder if he will notice. ...The answer will be provided after the show."

When she held a hand out toward the sign frame, the nudist spoke up.

"Isn't after the show too late?"

*"Ho ho? So you are finally taking on the *tsukkomi* role, Toori-sama?"*

"You were tempting me with that one!? Weren't you!?"

"...Heh."

Horizon glared at him and shrugged before turning back toward Katagiri.

"Now, what will you do?"

She clearly saw Katagiri nod beyond Kimi's shoulders.

"I know what I did 'wrong'," he said. "I shouldn't have just said 'testing'."

Katagiri regulated his breathing.

...Just calling it “testing” was a mistake.

He had failed to say something when talking about the testing Musashi needed for their school trip.

“Yes. I never said what kind of testing it is. ...I could hardly complain if you said I was finding fault without providing a proper explanation. You could say I was using the word ‘testing’ to get whatever I wanted.”

He had had a reason for that.

It was partially due to his desire to preserve his appearance as a negotiator. Especially when he was acting in Hashiba’s stead. He had wanted to maintain a clean image.

But he knew that what he should be doing.

When speaking with that shrine maiden, he had realized that his form of “manliness” was not to forcibly desire something or force himself to do something.

...It means to do what I already can as a man.

He was negotiating in Hashiba’s place.

...What I can do now is take on this dirty job.

So he mentioned the box that Musashi’s princess was holding.

“Musashi carried out stool testing for your school trip, didn’t you!? And that collection box labelled ‘#2’ was used for that! ...In that case, you need to take your school trip, Musashi!”

Kimi crossed her arms and opened her smiling mouth.

“You finally used the full term, didn’t you!? That’s right: stool testing! We worked hard that morning to make sure we produced lots and lots and put it inside the test tubes!”

“Test tubes...!?”

Asama: “Kimi! Kimi! He’s going to believe you, so please stop lying!”

A glance over at Horizon showed a double thumbs up, so she apparently had permission to continue.

“Ehhh?” said Asama and Suzu, so Kimi pulled them both close.

“We all produced some, didn’t we? Right, Suzu?”

“Eh? Oh, y-yes? You too...right, Asama-san?”

“Ahh! Yes, I did, I did! And we also did it back in April, didn’t we!?”

Mitotsudaira earnestly nodded.

“In April? Yes, we certainly did...”

Was that a bad memory for her? Regardless, Kimi looked to Katagiri.

“Hashiba, you, and the rest of the Ten Spears do it too, don’t you?”

Katagiri gulped.

...She’s turning it back on us!?

Tsurugi: “Katagiri-kun! Katagiri-kun! Don’t give in to her provocation!”

AnG: “Can’t we just all publicly announce it? Then there’s nothing to be afraid of.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Eh? W-wait a minute. Um, uh...”

They were not at all in agreement. But if he denied it, his criticism would lose all power.

In that case, he thought.

“I did it! As for the others, that is private information and I will leave it to your imagination! But I assure you we are not in violation of the rules!”

Asama yelled at Kimi who had turned her back and whose shoulders shook with laughter.

“Kimi! We could have just left ours secret too!”

“Asama-chi, aren’t you the one that self-destructed at Bell-rin’s prompting?”

Horizon gave her a right thumbs up, but what did that mean?

At any rate, Kimi spoke into the sign frame while wiping tears from her eyes.

“Then can I ask one thing?” The dancer smiled. “We have a secret weapon by the name of Adele. In the previous testing, she received inhuman results, so she requires retesting!! Can you really tell us all to go on the school trip now!?”

Katagiri shouted back on reflex.

“The retesting to which you refer is not for all of you! It is for a single individual!”

They had already known about this.

“Please do not misrepresent the situation! Since you do not all need to be retested, it is entirely possible for Musashi to go on its school trip!”

“Then.” The dancer stopped smiling. “Is Hashiba telling Adele not to go on the school trip?”

...Oh, no!

A tremor ran down Katagiri’s back. *She once again predicted what I would say.*

...That’s right.

Even if someone had to be retested and would not make it in time, the school trip could still take place. In that case, the person needing retesting would be left back at the academy while the others went on the school trip.

That was an unfortunate necessity.

He had been about to explain exactly that.

But Musashi’s dancer had skipped past that exchange and pointed out his intention. And she had more to say: “You are acting on Hashiba’s behalf, aren’t you?”

“————”

This is bad, he thought. She’s trying to drag me into an emotional argument.

...She’ll say Hashiba is cruel to not allow them to wait until that person can be

retested...

He could not let her trap him like that.

Besides, there was a fundamental hole in that argument.

“Whether or not you take the school trip before the retesting is your decision! That is not for us to decide!”

“Silly boy!” The dancer’s smile deepened. “The two of us are enemies. If we can’t complete the school trip before summer break, we can’t corner you. So we need to hold our school trip before summer break. ...But if we perform the retesting, we can’t do that.”

“Then-...”

Katagiri tried to say that was their problem. But in that moment...

Kuro-Take: “You should wait here, Katagiri-kun. If possible, you should divert the conversation elsewhere.”

□□凸: “Takenaka!? Why!?”

Kiyo-Massive: “Because we have currently made Mouri, Hexagone Française, the Kantou forces, and the Oushuu forces into our enemies. Isn’t that right, Takenaka?”

Kuro-Take: “Testament. That’s correct.”

Takenaka added a “listen”.

Kuro-Take: “That person on Musashi has spread an incredible amount of sparks with this one. ...This is setting a precedent saying that Hashiba will, in some cases, refuse to take extenuating circumstances into consideration when judging a nation’s actions or even the individual students therein. Do you understand what that means? ...While we use all of our power in our push against Mouri, we’re negotiating to make sure our allied and neutral nations do not take any hostile actions, but...”

□□凸: “Musashi is providing a reason to invite them to their side? This will show that even allying with Hashiba won’t necessarily protect you, so it’s better to join Musashi?”

Kiyo-Massive: “Mostly, it will harm people’s view of Hashiba-sama and us. And it makes Musashi look like the victim.”

That victimhood was of course entirely based on a false accusation, but...

...Facts aren’t all that influence people’s views!

Flat Vassal: “W-wait, what is this!? I’m a complete victim here, aren’t I!? Please don’t reveal to the entire world that I need my stool test redone!”

Me: “What did you eat, Adele?”

Flat Vassal: “J-just the normally distributed food! The same as everyone else! But I was playing with some of the dogs there, so their fur might have gotten in the container.”

Hori-ko: “Anyway, this means Adele-sama has become the key to moving the entire world. If a non-officer can accomplish that, you really can’t let your guard down with anyone, can you?”

Asama: “Kimi...? I’m going to scold you for this later, okay? You and Toori-kun both, so prepare yourselves. ...And don’t cover your ears like that.”

Katagiri thought about the fact that the enemy was trying to harm people’s view of them. But...

...Ignoring the retesting of Musashi’s vassal due to extenuating circumstances simply isn’t possible.

If they did that, they would be shirking their duty as students before even getting to the school trip issue.

But if they did not take the circumstances into account, Hashiba would be viewed as “correct” but “cold”.

Of course, there was simply not a good result that they could both benefit from. But...

□□凸: “Don’t worry. ...We will choose not to take circumstances into account.”

Tsurugi: "...Are you sure? That's like stepping into their trap."

"I am sure," said Katagiri. After all...

□□凸: "Listen. Musashi's dancer said we are enemies. That means we are in a position where circumstances do not matter. So by bringing this up..."

He raised his eyebrows and spoke aloud.

"You were asking whether we are aware of our position as enemies, weren't you?"

He finally understood what Musashi's dancer had meant before.

The summit's flower had been telling him to...

...Look forward, face your opponent, and speak your words.

In politics, you did not look up; you looked to the level playing field of the nations.

That was exactly right.

His enemy was clear, but this was different from the beginning. They understood their relationship to each other and they were more than just enemies.

"We are enemies who have seen each other's intentions and desires!"

Katagiri placed further words on top of those.

"I request that we negotiate!!"

Kimi raised the sides of her lips and looked back.

She looked to and patted Masazumi on the shoulder.

"Politician? Your opponent has finally become an 'enemy' you can speak with."

She could hear the enemy's voice.

"We recognize Musashi as an enemy! But we currently view only Musashi as our enemy and we ensure all other nations that we will maintain our current relationships! And," he said. "It does not matter if we are enemy or ally. As long

as the academy rules exist, a student must fulfill their duties as a student! If you are going to wage war, wait until you have completed that. ...Musashi, we demand you inform us whether you will retest that one student or if you will hold your school trip without her!”

Masazumi did not brush the Aoi Sister’s hand from her shoulder.

Instead, she lightly raised her right hand. The Aoi Sister lightly struck that hand with the hand on her shoulder.

They clapped together and Masazumi knew what to say.

“Good job buying us some time.”

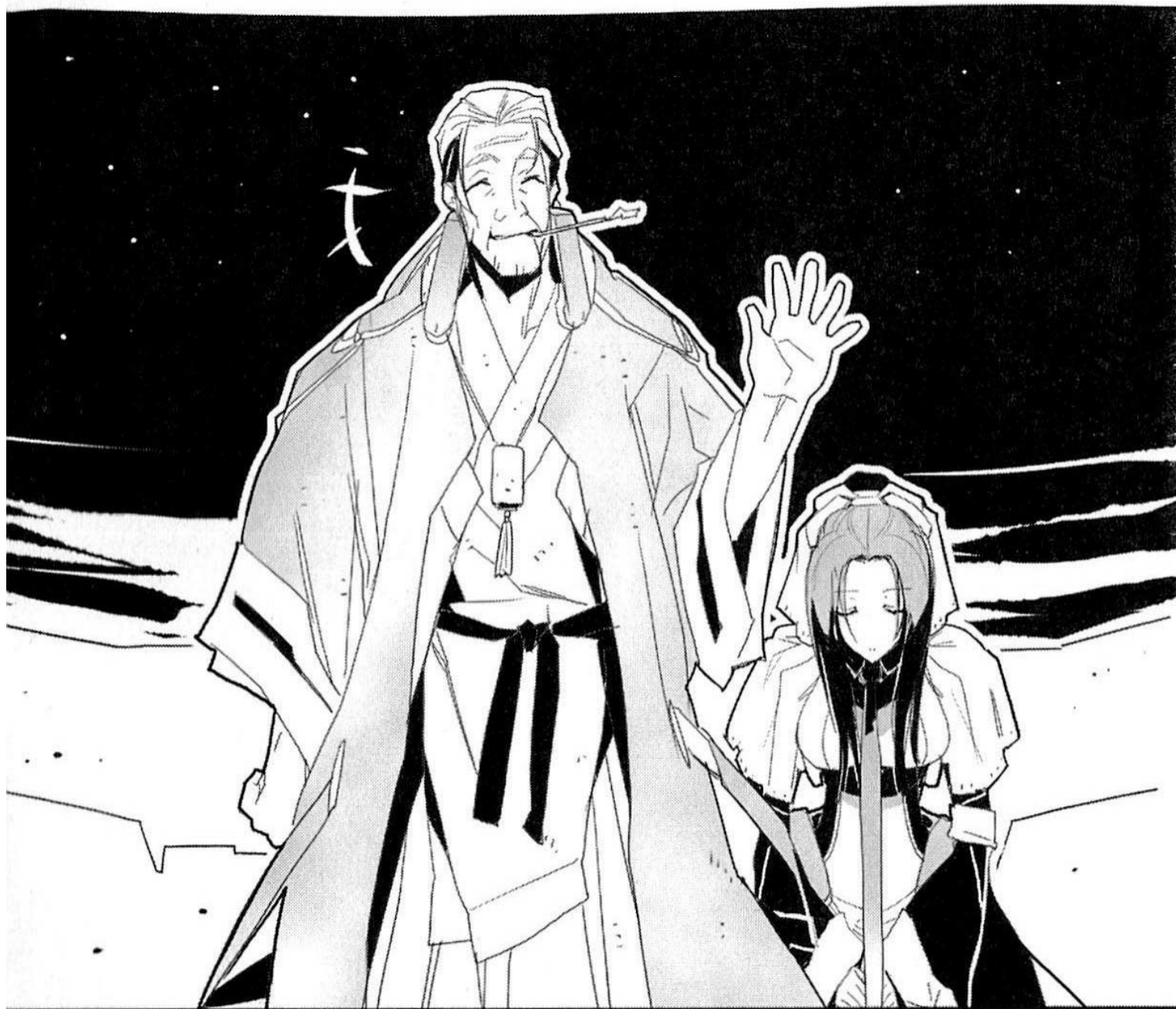
“After providing the opening act, I hope the main show will be worth the wait.”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi. “You’ll find out soon enough.”

Chapter 31: Demander at the Submission Table

第三十一章

『提出台の要求者』



何が不利かではなく
何が有利かを
望むのではなく選ぶ
配点（行き先）

It is not about your disadvantages

It is about your advantages

And you do not hope for them, you choose them

Point Allocation (Destination)

Katagiri prepared himself.

When Musashi's Vice President stepped forward to face him, she lightly raised her right hand.

Several sign frames were open around her.

Kuro-Take: "It looks like she was deciding something while you spoke with that dancer."

Kimee: "Does that mean we let them buy some time?"

□□凸: "I do not think that puts us at a disadvantage."

After all, he had grown a fair bit as a negotiator and he had made their relationship with Musashi clearer. It had involved statements that greatly surpassed his authority as a simple negotiator, but...

Tsurugi: "That's right. Katagiri-kun is doing quite well as Hashiba-sama's replacement."

Llaf: "About that..."

"Huh?" he said as Fukushima continued.

Llaf: "Katagiri-dono, I feel like thou never received an official request from Hashiba-sama to act on her behalf."

AnG: "Didn't a certain shrine maiden say something about this earlier?"

Tsurugi: "W-well, it's the flow of things that matters!! Yes, the flow!! And if it comes down to it, he can escape by saying, 'Turns out I'm not an official replacement after all~ Ah ha ha~ Sorry 'bout that~'!"

Kimee: "You're quite something yourself."

Kiyo-Massive: "Oh, Musashi's Vice President is saying something."

Katagiri quickly looked back to his opponent.

Musashi's Vice President was already looking at him.

"We have made our respective stances clear."

She continued without pausing.

"And I will admit that our preparations for the school trip were stalled by Adele Balfette's st-st-...test coming back positive for something inhuman."

Me: "What was that stuttering for?"

Vice President: "Sh-shut up! I hesitated because I don't usually use that term!"

Scarred: "Hee hee. It reminds me of when Master Tenzou confessed to me."

Hori-ko: "Discussing stool samples brings to mind a moving confession scene? The world is a strange place indeed."

Flat Vassal: "By the way, you mentioned me by name just now!"

Mal-Ga: "Don't worry. You're shooting to the top of the popularity poll on the divine network."

Flat Vassal: "They just think I'm a joke character!"

Katagiri looked at the hands of Musashi's Vice President who was glaring at something. He saw *lernen figurs* presumably for a divine chat appearing and disappearing.

...Is she exchanging information?

He was not sure. But he needed to be cautious and thoughtful.

After taking a breath, she looked his way again.

"Can you tell me something?"

"That will depend on what it is."

"Judge," she replied. "Is the Testament Union's demand that Musashi takes

our school trip an absolute demand?”

He had already stated this. So...

“Testament. Musashi has already made the preparations. ...If you prepare for your school trip but neglect that trip to wage war instead, we can only conclude that Musashi prioritizes war over its school events.”

“Judge. I agree with you there.”

Musashi’s Vice President nodded. And...

“Adele Balfette must be retested. Is that your conclusion?”

“Testament. I see no other possible conclusion.”

After all...

“I mean, taking a school trip when you are producing something inhuman? Are you trying to contaminate your destination?”

Marube-ya: “Huh? Does that mean the Musashi is being contaminated by Adele right now?”

Flat Vassal: “That occurred to me too, but I decided not to say it!”

Mal-Ga: “So did you take any medicine for it?”

Flat Vassal: “No, um, uh, just because poo-...no, wait. As an analogy, mixing pickled vegetables with your curry on the plate does not mean the vegetables were in the pot of curry!”

Me: “Isn’t a pickled leek a little too clean to have come from there?”

Asama: “Okay! Okay! Let’s try not to bring too much realism into this discussion!!”

Masazumi thought to herself while listening to the others begin a curry discussion behind her.

...Please don’t drag me into this.

For some reason, the Aoi Sister placed a hand on her shoulder from behind,

but she brushed it off.

She did feel bad for what she was doing to Balfette, but they were both from Class Plum. Looking only at the result, that girl was the key to turning this around. As for how...

“We will retest Adele Balfette,” she said to Katagiri. “And I would like to confirm one last thing with you. When you were negotiating with our Student... yes, our student. Just a student. During that negotiation, you refused to take any extenuating circumstances into account. Isn’t that right?”

Katagiri mentally frowned at the Musashi Vice President’s question.

...Is she still trying to ruin people’s view of us?

No, he realized. We have already established our relationship, so that wouldn’t work.

Then this would only earn them an infinitesimal amount of points.

“All students are equal. That is true of the academy rules, of the duty to perform school events, of the various opportunities they face, and of the need to be retested in a situation such as this. ...Retesting this student is a way of ensuring equality for your students and it is the duty of any student.”

So...

“If you wish to take the circumstances into consideration, please do so within Musashi and leave the academy rules out of it.”

“Judge.” Musashi’s Vice President nodded. “Equality. Equal opportunities. Musashi Ariadust Academy accepts that that is what the Testament Union seeks and what Musashi lacks.”

She raised her right hand and lowered her shoulders.

“In the name of equality, the entire 3rd year will be retested.”

“—————”

Katagiri was briefly dumbfounded.

...The entire 3rd year!?

“Please wait! What are you plotting!?”

“Huh? ...I’m merely saying it would be cruel to retest only Balfette who produced something inhuman.”

Flat Vassal: “You can be cruel if you want! Just please stop showing this weird sort of concern for me!”

Tachibana Wife: “It certainly is weird, so I can hardly argue otherwise, Master Muneshige.”

Tachibana Husband: “Agreed, Gin. Although I fear Miss Adele’s protests will fall on deaf ears.”

Musashi’s Vice President pointed at Katagiri and continued speaking.

“I am sure she would feel sad having to retake the stool test alone. So to take her circumstances into consideration within Musashi, I think the entire 3rd year will share Balfette’s pain. Or what? Is the Testament Union going to intrude on an internal matter and reject our equality and circumstances?”

Katagiri sensed danger in that question.

There was always a hidden meaning to these ridiculous exchanges. That was the danger he sensed.

So he raised his voice in response.

“I sense danger in Musashi’s equality and circumstances!”

“Then you are our enemy, Hashiba. ...You may be large, but you are a single force. That was not the statement of a Testament Union representative.”

“—————”

That was well done, thought Katagiri.

The negotiation with the dancer had seemed like it was to kill time. And he had thought he had gained an advantage by establishing their stance as enemies. But...

...Now she's using that against us!

He sensed the strength in his gaze as he faced her.

But Musashi's Vice President's shoulders remained lowered as she spoke.

"As the entire 3rd year will be retested, Musashi will rearrange our events somewhat. Meaning..."

Meaning...

"In lieu of a school trip, the 3rd year will hold...a study camp."

Masazumi took a deep breath.

...We will change the school trip into a study camp.

That change was a meaningful one. A school trip was much larger scale and required at least 4 or 5 nights, but a study camp could be completed in only 3 nights.

Thus, she would reset everything with the retesting and change it to a study camp.

That was her idea. But...

"You can't do that," she heard Katagiri say. "Musashi Ariadust Academy's 3rd year held a study camp last year in the 2nd year. ...You can't change your school trip into a study camp at this point."

"Yes, we can. After all, we have the Testament Union's support on this."

"The Testament Union's...?"

Katagiri frowned, so she explained.

"The study camp held during the 2nd year in Musashi Ariadust Academy is meant as practice for the 3rd year school trip. By traveling as a group and sleeping over for a short period, we familiarize ourselves with what will be necessary for something longer term."

"But...what would be the point in redoing that now!?"

"Have you forgotten? Musashi joined with Mikawa at the Battle of Mikawa."

Masazumi swung her arms out horizontally to indicate all of the Musashi's ships. "The Testament Union has demanded that Musashi provide equality and equal opportunities. So that is what we will do. Mikawa's students currently attend Musashi Ariadust Academy's branch school within Musashi. They generally live the same as us, but our main school takes care of their school events for them. But...if they are to work alongside Musashi's students, they require the opportunity to do so. After all, Mikawa's students are still not familiar with Musashi's rules."

So...

"If Musashi and Mikawa are to go on a joint school trip, the Mikawa students must first be familiarized with Musashi. So to ensure equality, Musashi Ariadust Academy will abandon our planned school trip and give the Mikawa and Musashi 3rd years a chance to hold a study camp where we can learn to work together."

Mitotsudaira tilted her head at Masazumi's word.

"What are the Mikawa students doing these days?"

She had heard they were using an underground wide block as a school, but she had never gone to see them.

...How are they doing there?

As she wondered that, Futayo turned back and nodded.

"Most of the students from Mikawa have joined the Far Eastern guard unit."

"Oh, is that so?"

The Far Eastern guard unit was a unit originally from Mikawa that was the sole Far Eastern unit officially permitted to bear weaponry. Mikawa had been neutral land and the guard unit had existed to protect the Far Eastern leader in the Matsudaira headquarters, but they had joined with Musashi at the Battle of Mikawa. During times of peace, they worked with the guard stations. During times of war, they worked with the Chancellor's Officers.

Futayo was their leader, so they were treated a lot like her private warriors.

However...

“The Mikawa people feel like freeloaders on Musashi and feel indebted to you. So when they tried to find something they could do to repay you, they decided to protect Musashi by joining the guard unit, the Far East’s only official independent combat organization. Thanks to that, the guard unit has tripled in number since they came to Musashi.”

I see, thought Mitotsudaira.

...That would explain why our front lines grew so much thicker.

The students working for the Chancellor’s Officers were not very experienced. In comparison, the guard unit had held joint practice sessions with other nations, so they were much better trained.

During battles, the guard unit generally set up a front line, the students working for the Chancellor’s Officers filled the space behind that, and the two groups worked together. But...

“Is it that sense of being indebted freeloaders that causes the guard unit to fulfill their duties on the front line without complaint?” asked Mitotsudaira.

“Judge,” confirmed Futayo. “They are technically under my command, but I tend to take part in duels or protect VIPs, so it is the second-in-command on down that works with the various Chancellor’s Officers units.”

I see, thought Mitotsudaira again as she turned toward a certain individual.

It was the 1st Special Duty Officer. After all...

“...1st Special Duty Officer? You act as an intermediary and leader for that cooperation, don’t you? So why didn’t you know about their background or situation?”

“W-well, if I did know, it would probably only lead to me showing unwanted concern for them...”

Mary smiled a little next to him.

“Did the guard unit tell you that?”

“No, no, no. Th-that isn’t it at all.”

His reply was frantic, but the 1st Special Duty Officer could not state this plainly.

That was what this was.

Futayo smiled bitterly at the exchange. She then nodded and spoke.

“If the members of the guard unit could spend time with us as students for the school events, the teamwork between them and the Chancellor’s Officers would likely be much easier.”

“That’s true. Instead of just having the 1st Special Duty Officer, and probably the Secretary, leading them, they could establish teamwork with us and the other Committee Heads too.”

But, thought Mitotsudaira as she looked to the back of the person on her thoughts.

Honda Masazumi.

Their Vice President was from Mikawa. And if anything, she had left Mikawa. If she was advocating equality between Mikawa and Musashi...

Silver Wolf: “Masazumi really is becoming a Musashi resident.”

Vice President: “What is that supposed to mean? It sounds like some kind of point of no return.”

Asama: “That’s right, Mito. You make it sound like Masazumi only went crazy recently. She’s always been a Musashi resident.”

Almost Everyone: “That’s even worse!!”

Anyway, thought Mitotsudaira as she spoke to Masazumi.

“You intend to hold the study camp before summer break, don’t you?”

“Judge,” replied Masazumi.

Katagiri stood within the sign frame in front of her.

That enemy frowned and gave her a sharp look.

She spoke to him.

“As the Testament Union requested, we will prioritize equality here. ...No complaints there, I assume.”

“How many days are you planning for?”

“3 days and 2 nights.”

“It would have to be 4 days and 3 nights.”

“That does not take Musashi’s travel time into account. We will spend 3 days and 2 nights at the site. Look at it that way.”

“Is that so?” Katagiri nodded. “This will not become a local training camp in a nearby land such as Mito or Shirakawa, will it?”

“That is not our plan.”

“Then,” said Katagiri. “4 days and 3 nights including travel time.”

However...

“That begins upon arrival. And you cannot travel at night and count it as a full day.”

I see, thought Masazumi. He was accepting 3 days and 2 nights for the study camp, but afterwards, they would either have to spend a night traveling to Houjou or use up the full 4 days and 3 nights at the study camp.

...I had hoped we could travel to Houjou right after the study camp.

If they were going to Houjou, they would have to make a number of preparations. So...

...I should look at that day of travel as having a safe day on which the other nations can’t do anything to us.

“Judge. We will agree to that.”

Katagiri nodded. He produced a sign frame saying “acknowledgement” and stamped it “approved”. That was a quick decision, but he was not letting Musashi escape and he knew his role here.

He gave her a quiet look.

“We also agree. ...But I do have one reminder as the Testament Union: What

Musashi is about to do is part of your school events.”

“That is our intention.”

“Then...you are restricted from all diplomacy, trade, and support.”

All at once, he sealed off everything they might want to do.

But Masazumi calmly nodded.

“That is indeed how a study camp works.”

Vice President: “Aoi Sister! This guy has gotten a lot sharper than before!”

Wise Sister: “Oh, dear. I would prefer you didn’t blame me for your own mistakes. Heh heh heh.”

Hori-ko: “If we cannot engage in diplomacy or anything else, then the Musashi is only a giant obstacle, making it nothing but a nuisance.”

Musashi: “I look magnificent when viewed from below. That is a point in my favor. Over.”

Me: “You talking about your boobs or your panties? ...Oh, stay. All of you stay. Put away your weapons! Oh, and a fist counts as a weapon! A knee!?”

The Testament Union’s emphasis on school events prevented them from engaging in trade or diplomacy during their study camp.

...We don’t really have a choice when we’re only holding the study camp at the behest of the Testament Union.

It should be fine, thought Masazumi. My father’s group and our Dark Treasurer should be able to handle trade and diplomacy. The bigger problem was something else.

...We’re restricted from using nearby areas.

It would honestly be safer to use an allied area like Oushuu, but...

Vice President: “If I’m being greedy, I would want to go somewhere other than Oushuu for the study camp.”

Novice: “Yes, if we went to Oushuu, we wouldn’t be able to respond immediately if Houjou or P.A. Oda did something.”

“Judge,” she agreed just before Yoshiyasu made a suggestion.

Righteousness: “Then how about actually going to Houjou?”

It was not a bad idea.

...No, it’s close to being the best idea.

After all...

Righteousness: “The history recreation that Matsudaira must complete after the Battle of Kanagawa is the Tensho Jingo Conflict fought against Houjou for control of Kantou. You’re being forced to hold a study camp, but if you do it at Houjou, you should be able to shift right into the Tensho Jingo Conflict once the time allotted for the school event is over.”

Vice President: “That would be best and I also want to head straight to Houjou after the study camp is over.”

“But,” said Masazumi.

Vice President: “We can’t choose to go to Houjou for the study camp itself.”

Probably so, agreed Yoshiyasu.

...It isn’t possible to hold the study camp in Houjou.

She had already found the reason in her own mind. And that reason was...

Me: “Because there are tentacles in Houjou?”

Musashi’s princess and the Asama shrine maiden beckoned the idiot over and took him behind the others. Lecturing voices could be heard in the background as the Vice President continued without them.

Vice President: “Houjou only just now chose to oppose P.A. Oda. But what would happen if Musashi went there for our study camp?”

Novice: “Good question. The Tottori Castle is still in Edo and the forces that couldn’t join the attack on Mouri are still in P.A. Oda. The Kantou and Oushuu

clans are leaning towards Musashi at the moment, so P.A. Oda will likely work to suppress Houjou as an example and a warning. In the worst case, they might complete the Siege of Odawara before we do the Tensho Jingo Conflict.”

Mal-Ga: “That just means Houjou’s destruction, so does that really matter to us? And the Siege of Odawara will fulfill a history recreation from after Nobunaga’s assassination.”

Novice: “Meanwhile, Musashi will be holding its study camp and won’t be able to take part in the fighting.”

That was exactly right. And what would happen in that case?

Vice President: “Due to the school events, Musashi can’t defend against the threat of P.A. Oda. ...That will be what the other nations see. And...”

And...

Vice President: “In the worst case, Houjou will be lost before the study camp ends and we will find ourselves isolated and surrounded by P.A. Oda. They will begin the Battle of Komaki Nagakute right then and there. ...Matsudaira defeats Hashiba in that battle, but they will likely use the momentum of defeating Houjou to strike us.”

Yoshiyasu breathed an invisible sigh in her heart when she heard that.

...Honestly.

This was so very different from a year ago.

Last year at this time, she had been defying Yoshiyori while preparing for battle against Houjou.

She had been hoping that Yoshiyori would tell her everything about her sister once they eventually settled things with Houjou.

But what about now?

“Dammit...”

What did Ujinao think about the current situation?

Even if she had an automaton body, she did not focus on the “best” answer as much as Musashi’s Princess. And could those even be called “best”? Yoshiyasu

had a feeling that was something else.

At any rate, Ujinao was the only person from back then that Yoshiyasu had any connection left with. And yet...

Righteousness: “I never thought Kantou would be in a situation where we had to discuss the ‘worst case’.”

Her words on the divine transmission were no more than grumbling.

But Musashi’s 3rd Special Duty Officer picked up on them and raised her right hand.

Gold Mar: “Yoshy, what do you think Musashi should do in that case?”

“Judge,” Yoshiyasu sent to everyone.

Righteousness: “You should extend the study camp beyond the destruction of Houjou.”

It was simple. The school event would protect them. In other words...

Righteousness: “The Battle of Komaki Nagakute cannot begin during your study camp. And if Houjou is destroyed while you hold the study camp in Houjou, you would have to redo the study camp. ...You could probably use that excuse to ensure your safety. ...Of course, while that would protect Musashi, it would destroy any influence you have.”

“Wait,” said an actual voice.

It belonged to Musashi’s princess who was lecturing the idiot along with the shrine maiden. At some point, the idiot sister had ended up alongside the idiot while pretending to cry, so the knight joined the shrine maiden in lecturing them both. What was all that?

At any rate, Musashi’s princess began to speak.

Hori-ko: “Either way, isn’t Houjou in the most danger at the moment? Now that they have made an enemy of Hashiba-sama, I have determined Houjou is doomed no matter what they do. So why doesn’t Houjou allow Hashiba-sama to invade them right away?”

“That’s a good point,” said Musashi’s Vice President with a sigh.

Vice President: “But currently, I doubt Houjou will be attacked by Hashiba as long as Musashi does not hold our study camp there.”

“What do you make of this negotiation, aunt?”

In the sky further north than the Ariake, a long god of war aircraft carrier floated above a black forest. Masamune spoke from its deck.

Her question was answered via sign frame by Yoshiaki, the Fox of Ushuu.

Nine Tail Girl: “I’ll be drinking some sake so the night breeze doesn’t give me a chill.”

“Go ahead.”

A few seconds after she spoke to the voice-input sign frame, she heard a post-sake sigh followed by Yoshiaki’s voice.

Nine Tail Girl: “The Musashi Vice President’s decision was likely made after seeing the Azuchi Castle’s movements. ...If Hashiba intended to make an example out of Houjou, they would have immediately sent the Azuchi Castle back and brought the flames of war to Houjou. But the Azuchi Castle is still on its way to Mouri. Do you know why?”

“Because Hashiba sees the attack on Mouri as more important.”

“Probably so,” agreed the fox.

On the sign frame, Yoshiaki took a sip from her sake cup and narrowed her eyes.

Nine Tail Girl: “Hashiba is awfully calm about this. Houjou may have turned on them, but they are not panicking and they already had something in place to deal with it.”

“You mean leaving the Tottori Castle in Edo?”

Nine Tail Girl: “I mean leaving any military force in Edo at all.”

Masamune responded to that small correction with a small smile.

“True. ...Having a military force at Edo is a history recreation of the Bunroku Campaign. Of the forces not participating in the attack on Mouri, Hashiba can

send in those participating in the Bunroku Campaign to instantly deal with Houjou if the need arises. ...Thus, the threat of Hashiba has not left Kantou even with the Azuchi gone. In fact, Houjou's actions bring tension to Kantou and force them to consider the threat of Hashiba. Because if something happens here, Hashiba might just take action."

Nine Tail Girl: "Yes. ...Hashiba has driven a wedge into things by not taking immediate action against Houjou's rebellion."

Shakenobe poured sake into her raised cup.

More than just a little, a round bump of clear liquid rose a bit above the top of the cup.

Nine Tail Girl: "Houjou's rebellion is part of the history recreation. Hashiba sent the Azuchi away as if to say they were overlooking it for that reason. But Hashiba will not allow anyone else to take action here in Kantou. ...Hashiba makes their Great Return from Mouri. And instead of taking revenge for Nobunaga's assassination, they might just be coming to punish Kantou."

"Now, then," said Yoshiaki.

Nine Tail Girl: "Musashi, those school events are a pain, but a study camp is sure to be fun. Where will you be going? Anywhere neighboring Kantou is off limits and Houjou is also off the table. ...Will you come to Oushuu? You will be unable to respond immediately to Hashiba or Houjou's actions, but I will prepare lots of treats for you."

Now, then, thought Masazumi to prepare the words in her heart.

...Where will we go for the study camp?

It could not be anywhere too distant. Somewhere with a land port built for Musashi would be best, but she doubted they could be that picky.

...I'm worried about the repairs to the Ariake, but the Ariake will have to manage that on its own.

Upon thinking that, Masazumi realized something.

She was already fully intending on doing this study camp.

She had decided on this in the previous discussions and there were other things that worried her, but she had no problem with doing this.

That just left one question: where?

“There is one candidate.”

It was near Kantou and it would allow them to have some influence on Hashiba.

Just as she prepared to say what it was, she heard a voice from the stairs leading up to the bridge where the meeting was being held.

“Masazumi-kun. When you announce a study camp out of the blue, I believe I get a say.”

That question came from a certain man. And he had “Musashi” walking up behind him.

“Principal Sakai...!”

Mitotsudaira looked back as Sakai raised his hand in greeting.

In front of her, the idiot was seated politely, hanging his head, and repeating “yes, ma’am” to Asama’s lecture, but she ignored that for the time being.

“Principal Sakai... Do you have a good connection we can use for the study camp destination?”

She turned toward Sakai who tilted his head and spoke.

“Hmm... It’s not so much a connection as, well, an old acquaintance.”

With that, he looked in a different direction.

Two people lay in one corner of the bridge.

After being left alone for so long, Sanada Nobuyuki was lying on his side with his back to them and the other man was similarly lying on the bridge and playing a sign frame game.

“Umm, Masayuki-san.”

“Nh?”

Sanada Masayuki sat up and saw Sakai.

“—————”

His eyes immediately widened and he quickly hopped up.

After prostrating himself, he grabbed his son's back and forced the younger man up with a single hand. It was a precise action, and...

...Oh?

Mitotsudaira glanced over to see Naomasa uttering an impressed “oh?” of her own. This must have been the man's true power. And as the Sanada Chancellor got up on his knees.

“Sakai-sama! I-...”

“I have heard. Thank you.”

Sakai smiled and sat down, but Masayuki bowed his head as if in competition. But Mitotsudaira could not help but comment.

“Principal Sakai can be polite to people?”

“What kind of person do all of you think I am?” asked the man.

“Judge,” said “Musashi” as she glared at him. “They find it hard to believe you can accomplish such a feat or that you would ever think to do so. Over.”

“You're being kind of harsh, ‘Musashi’-san. This is...y'know? Someone who helped me out a long time ago.”

Masayuki bowed even further and used his right hand to hold confused Nobuyuki's head down as well. He pressed the unworthy son's forehead to the floor.

“Ow, ow, ow, ow. That hurts, papa! What is going on!?”

“...A lot happened in the past!”

“That it did.” Sakai sighed. “Well, you all get the picture. Now, Masayuki-san, could you rent out a place for my students?”

When Sakai asked that, Mitotsudaira noticed 3 different reactions.

The first was Sanada's Chancellor raising his bowed head in speechless shock.

The second was...

“...!”

She saw Katagiri’s eyebrows rise on the sign frame. And the third...

“————”

...was in the sky. Something rapidly circled from north to west high in the night sky overhead.

“I have determined that is a dragon. And...”

Just as “Musashi” tried to give a report, a sudden tremor assaulted the Ariake and the Musashi contained inside.

Something in the sky had rapidly landed on the starboard edge of the Ariake.

What was it?

Mitotsudaira saw the giant form attempting to move to eye level with them from the Ariake’s rear starboard edge.

Its shape was clear. It was giant, it was not humanoid, and it had wings.

“A dragon...!”

“Indeed.”

Masazumi heard a voice from the giant form bending the Ariake’s opened upper armor.

It was a dragon. The great dragon was pure white and measured more than 120m long. It had 6 wings and it was not one of the beast dragons known as Terrestrial Dragons. It was one of the Celestial Dragons with high-level intelligence.

The white dragon spoke calmly.

“I am from Sanada Academy. My inherited name is...‘Former’ Sarutobi Sasuke.”

The loud and deep voice seemed to be produced by multiple windpipes.

The tremor of that voice was definitely directed at them.

“If you enter Sanada land, mankind, know that you may find yourself facing the 2 Celestial Dragons who are all that remain of the former Ten Braves. I bring that warning on behalf of our leader, Sanada Nobushige-sama. We...”

They...

“We will protect Sanada land in order to send Sanada Nobushige-sama to Hashiba.”

Chapter 32: Giant Arriving Forms

第三十二章

『辿り着きの巨影達』



吠えたことがあった
吠えることはあるか
配点 (違う道)

I have roared

Do you ever roar?

Point Allocation (Different Paths)

“It seems our teachers have made an appearance.”

A woman’s voice spoke above the dirt and accumulated conifer leaves at the bottom of the darkness.

After a while, there was a mechanical sound, but the next voice came from a different direction than that.

“Stop it, Mochizuki. You’ll just give away our position.”

“Testament. Understood, Kakei-sama. ...I thought Unno-sama would be redoing her makeup.”

“Don’t worry about that,” said Unno as she looked up into the darkness.

A forest of tall conifer trees gave occasional glimpses of the dark blue night sky overhead. There was nothing visible in those small regions of sky, but instead...

“Takigawa’s accompanying ships have gone to protect the Shirasagi Castle. Based on the sound of their fall, only the Shirasagi Castle’s starboard ship is in any kind of recognizable shape.”

“Maybe this will reduce how responsible we’re held for retreating. I’m hoping people will look at it as the tenants not standing a chance when their landlady was beaten so badly.”

In the darkness, something was heard being stretched out and attached.

“Kakei-sama, about your bone fracture...”

“I’ll sleep with this repair seal attached. It’s forceful, but I can’t move around until the bone is connected again.”

“Are you planning a second round?”

“Of course. Our teachers have shown up and we haven’t been freed from our

job working for Takigawa. P.A. Oda hasn't checked on everything either."

Also...

"I seriously doubt the academy is going to ask P.A. Oda if their ninjas can come home. They're more likely to say their ninjas are fine and can keep fighting. I mean, Miyoshi-san is in charge right now."

"Yeah." Unno smiled bitterly. "Musashi is apparently holding a study camp, but they'll be back here in a few days. Until then..."

"Testament." Mochizuki tossed a dark sign frame to both of them. "This is your recovery schedule for the 2-3 nights until Musashi returns. I have already been repaired, so you two must follow this schedule starting tonight."

"I think I kinda like that side of you," said Kakei.

"Thank you very much," said Mochizuki with a nod. And...

"..."

A long roar rumbled in from the distant sky.

The leaves shook and the sleeping birds stirred.

And at the bottom of that gathering of noise, Kakei took a deep breath and spoke.

"That would be Sasuke-sensei..."

"Testament." Unno could be heard lightly spreading out a portable blanket as she responded. "Our teacher is already gone. ...I wonder if those 2 feel lonely."

After all...

"That roar sounded really happy."

Masazumi heard a dragon laugh for the very first time.

Of course, this was her first clear encounter with a dragon. Behind her, the Date Vice Chancellor felt the need to speak.

"I suppose not even a certain idiotic half-dragon would stand a chance against that."

“Oh? Do you want my help?”

Curious about that, Masazumi asked her about it.

“Date Vice Chancellor... Are you knowledgeable about dragons?”

“A lot of Terrestrial Dragons live in the north...or rather, in Europe and the mountains east of Kantou. The winged Celestial Dragons, on the other hand, wanted a proper home, so they are more scattered around. ...They mostly live in Europe, east of Kantou, or along the line from Chubu to central Oushuu. And...”

And...

“I believe the primary faction of Celestial Dragons chose Sanada as their home. ...I think Masamune would know more about this.”

“No, that’s enough. In that case, would they be former nonhuman students?”

“Judge,” confirmed the Date Vice Chancellor. “If he poses a physical challenge, I could take him on.”

“Ho ho?” said Sasuke.

He slowly moved his giant body. The people on the Musashi scattered out of the way as he leaned toward the ship.

“We once took part in the suppression of the Germanic peoples and destroyed Europe, but a little girl thinks she can challenge us? I could fire my dragon cannon here and take care of you all. In fact, I kind of want you to give me the opportunity. I could use a warmup exercise before my first rampage in a long, long time.”

“I apologize for interrupting your excitement, but could you possibly leave?” asked Masazumi.

She checked the sign frame in her hand to make sure the firing unit and defense unit primarily composed of gods of war were spread out in a fan shape around Sasuke.

“With such a sudden visit, we can hear what you have to say, but we can’t be very hospitable.”

“Judge. That is correct,” said Horizon to help out.

Masazumi gasped and checked Horizon’s hands. Beyond Horizon, Mitotsudaira prepared for action and communicated with Masazumi via eye contact *She isn’t showing any sign of a surprise Logismo Oplo attack!*

Restrain her if she does!

Masazumi was also worried about the way Neshinbara was staring at Sasuke with an autograph sheet in hand. *Wait, he has 2 autograph sheets...*

Then Horizon took a step forward.

“Sasuke-sama was it? Why are you so concerned about us visiting Sanada? Is there some kind of secret there?”

“Indeed there is.”

“Then how about we make a deal? ...If you tell us that secret, we will not visit Sanada.”

...Calm down...!

Masazumi stared at Horizon’s face, but this was simply too novel. *In fact, I kind of feel like I haven’t been in control of the negotiations today.*

The dragon briefly stopped speaking, but before long...

“I would be willing to tell you if you let me fire my dragon cannon here.”

“Fire it at what?”

Horizon looked around and everyone, including the normal citizens down below, fled or took cover.

Masazumi also looked around at them all.

“We might all be in trouble if this *dragon* cannon business were to *drag on* much longer. ...Just kidding.”

Masazumi heard everything fall silent.

A few seconds passed, a few more motionless breaths passed, and she nodded.

“That must have been too novel for everyone.”

With an odd sweat pouring down her face, Horizon silently placed a hand on Masazumi’s shoulder.

And why were Mitotsudaira and Asama looking the other way and hanging their heads? On the folded-up upper armor of the Ariake’s starboard side, Sasuke faced north.

“Kah...”

He produced a noise from his throat as he breathed in.

“Peh.”

The white dragon spat a phlegmy breath into the sky.

...He’s certainly confident.

Did that come from his pride as a dragon or his power as one?

But Masazumi saw Sakai open his mouth in a horizontal smile.

...What?

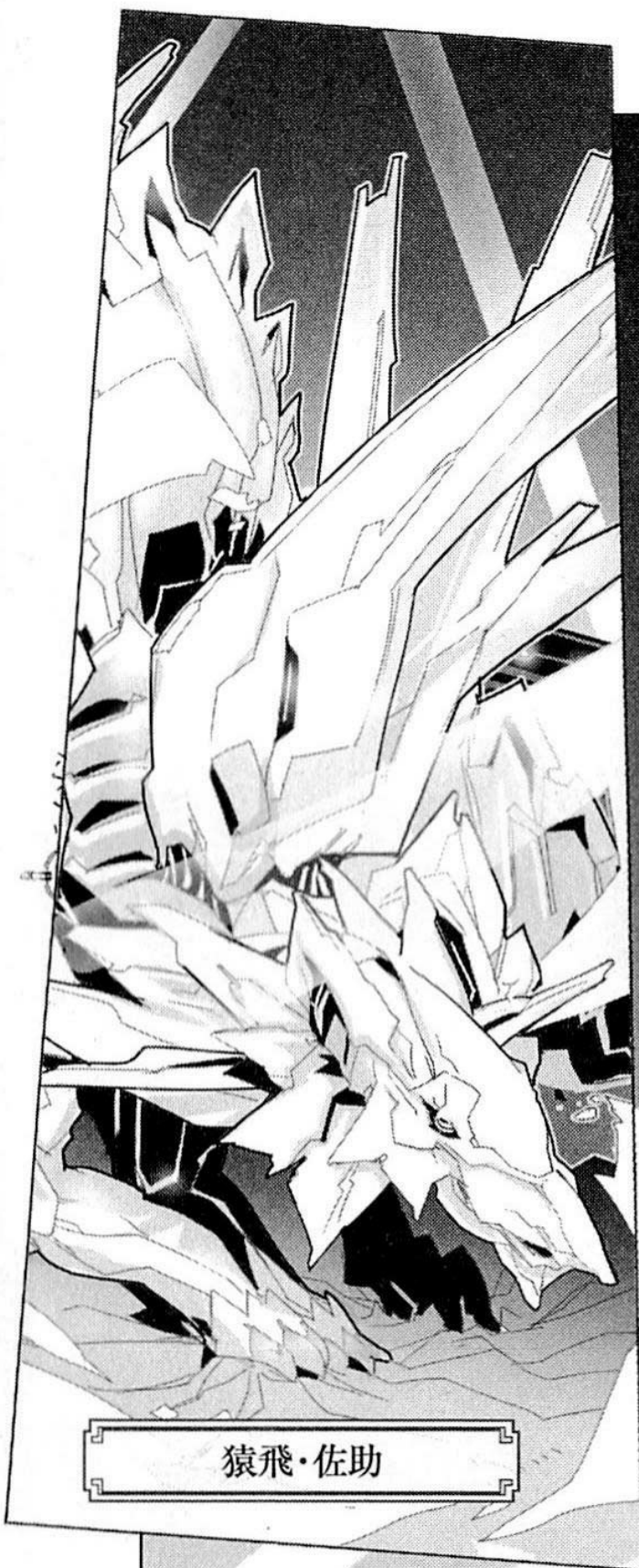
It looked like he was enjoying himself. And as Masazumi tried to figure out why that would be...

“Huh...?”

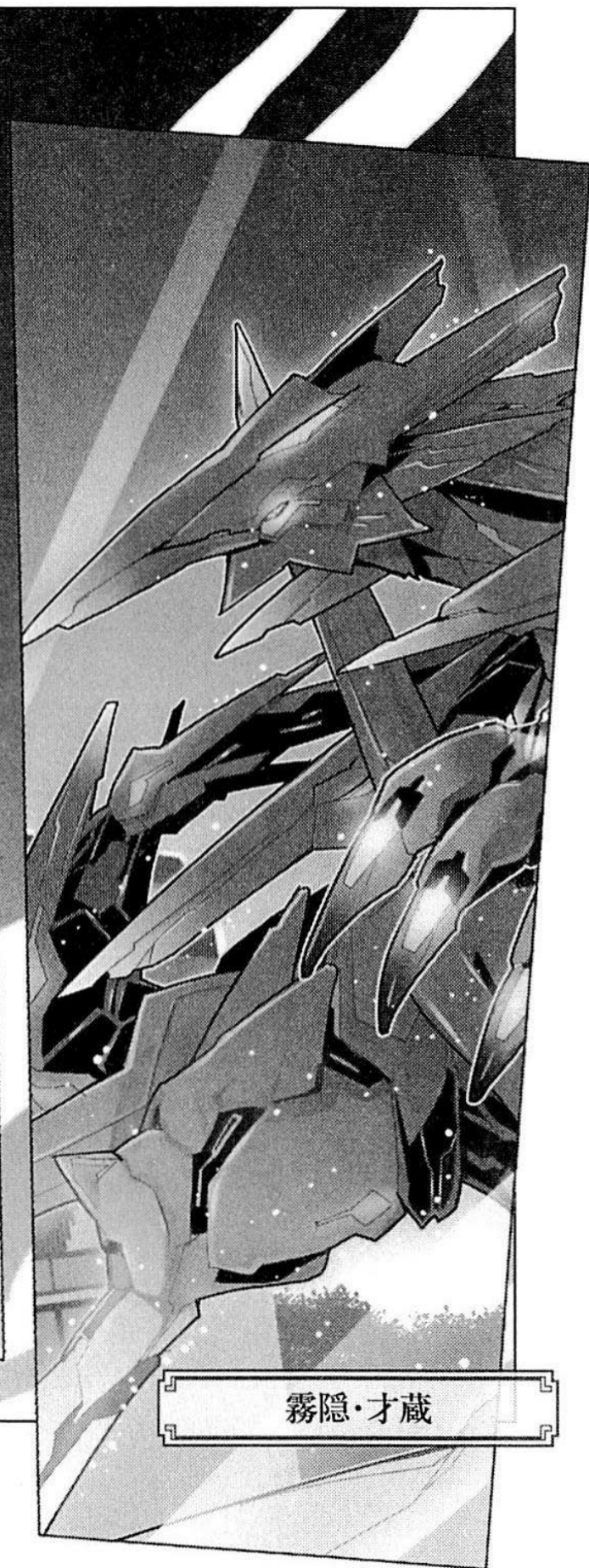
Mukai held her hands out toward the port-side to the left of the bridge.

She looked like she was trying to grab and enlarge something in the air, but then she hesitated.

“What...is this?”



猿飛・佐助



霧隠・才藏

She tilted her head.

“Just as the 2nd generation said, you are indeed incredible!”

With that voice, something appeared in the sky to port.

It was a dragon. A pitch black one.

“I am the original generation Kirigakure Saizou. Remember that!”

Asama gasped.

...He slipped past our local quarantine system!?

No, she answered herself. As long as the concept of land exists, any intrusion by an outsider will be detected. We also recently increased the sensitivity for security purposes. And...

“What is this...?”

Several sign frames judging him non-local opened around Saizou after he appeared. And a report was sent to Asama.

He had been detected.

But not while he was hidden.

...What does that mean...?

She did not know. But it was true that Suzu had noticed. Asama made a mental note to ask her about that later, but then she noticed something else.

“Ah! Suzu-san!”

“Oh? So your name is Suzu.”

It happened the instant Saizou turned his giant face toward Suzu.

Surprised by the dragon’s sudden appearance and loud voice, Suzu leaned back to look up into the heavens.

“Wah...”

It started as a simple voice.

“Wahhhhhhhh!!!!”

But she soon wailed at the top of her lungs.

“Nwoh,” said Saizou as he leaned back.

...I screwed up there!

He had spoken in surprise and joy without thinking.

Not good, not good. Now that I think about it, whether we're talking about Unno or Isa, all the girls at our place would only laugh if you shouted at them.

This reaction is certainly refreshing... No, I was simply careless, concluded Saizou. So...

“Yeah, sorry about that...”

But she seemed to have completely panicked.

“Ah...!”

Hearing his voice only brought back the shock from before. *What am I supposed to do about this?* he wondered as Sasuke spoke from the starboard side.

“Saitou, you're such a fool.”

“Damn you...!”

“Wahhhhhh!!” cried the girl.

“See? She's crying again thanks to your voice.”

“Wahhhh!”

The girl named Suzu trembled and accurately pointed at both Saizou to port and Sasuke to starboard.

“I-I don't I-like...these people!”

Sasuke wrinkled his brow at that.

So Saizou also moved as if looking up at him.

...That's what you get!

Sasuke glared at him, but he did not care. However, this situation was not

conducive to conversation. As he wondered what to do, Musashi's shrine maiden took action.

"L-look, Suzu-san? There's a butt-shaped cushion on my chest. Oh, but there's nothing impure about this."

She comforted Suzu with some contradictory statements. Then some students carrying anti-god of war rifles arrived from the bottom of the stairs and from the academy's front entrance.

"Are you the ones that made Musashi's precious bangs girl cry!?"

"You might be dragons, but we stand unified against all who defile our genre!"

"Exactly right! This is our courage! It's a definite trust that will carry us through to tomorrow!"

There were a few dozen of them, but Saizou was more worried about their sanity than anything.

"Your parents would cry," he warned them.

"Heh heh. Silly dragon! Have you lived so long you've forgotten what parents are like!?" Musashi's dancer pointed at him from the center of the bridge.

"Everyone's parents' final genre is 'my husband' or 'my wife'! So as they raise us, they can't complain when we get hooked on a genre that will eventually lead to the next generation! Everyone looks to reality and learns what their heart desires so they can adjust their genre to match their husband or wife. If you forget that and reject the entire idea of genres, then you end up with nothing more than a mechanical act of combining that is void of all dreams!"

"I see. That does make sense."

"Yay!" celebrated the dancer as she groped a nearby Loup Garou's breasts. The meaning of that action was unclear, but Saizou guessed it was some sort of ritual. However...

"That said, we are Celestial Dragons, which makes us a type of spirit. We generally have no parents and are born from the natural world's ley lines or an ether 'mold'. So, dancer, we can only understand this idea of yours as a

feeling.”

“Kimi! Kimi! He defeated your argument on a species level!”

“That’s fine! Now, Mitotsudaira, you grope me!”

The meaning of that was entirely unclear, but in the meantime, Musashi’s shrine maiden, nudist, and automaton princess had comforted the girl named Suzu and stopped her crying.

...*Hm.*

They had visited this unfamiliar land for a greeting while having some fun, but...

“What’s so funny, Sakai?”

“Oh, nothing. I know I shouldn’t be laughing.”

“I feel the need to thank you for that time twenty-odd years ago.”

“You know you can’t do that. It wouldn’t make them very happy.”

“...I am in your debt.”

On the other side, Sasuke also nodded. But...

“This is not in lieu of thanks, but we will give you a warning.”

“Judge, judge.” Sakai waved toward Sasuke. “No need. They’re all going. It’s... well, you know. When I destroyed it, I didn’t really understand anything, but my actions still had meaning.”

Saizou remained motionless in response to Sakai’s words. He simply breathed like normal and followed Sasuke’s lead.

“If they go there and enter our land, there will be a battle,” said Sasuke.

“So you’re sending the young Sanada master to Hashiba?”

“Testament. He will be given favorable battle results against Matsudaira for a better position within Hashiba’s forces. Sanada has received word that, if Musashi’s forces fight on Sanada land,” Sasuke breathed a glowing sigh, “it will be counted as a recreation of the First Siege of Ueda between Sanada and Matsudaira.”

Novice: “Now! Tonight’s Super Neshinbara Time has arrived!”

Unturning: “The First Siege of Ueda is the post-Nobunaga battle in which Matsudaira fights and drives out Sanada after having defeated Hashiba at Komaki Nagakute. ...At the time, Sanada was allied with Matsudaira, but as terms for allying with Matsudaira, Houjou demanded Sanada’s Ueda Castle. When Matsudaira attempted to do so, Sanada fought a defensive battle.”

Tachibana Wife: “Stating the conclusion first and giving the details second? That is an explanation based on the rules of comprehension.”

Flat Vassal: You can really see the difference in personality...”

Mal-Ga: “Yes, some people have very roundabout personalities. I won’t name names, but it’s Neshinbara.”

Novice: “Are you saying that’s just one name and not ‘names’!? Is that what this is!?”

Masazumi crossed her arms.

The request for Sanada to recreate the First Siege of Ueda had likely been made during the previous meeting. A Hashiba member other than Katagiri must have done it.

...This is real pain.

If they recreated the First Siege of Ueda, they could not withdraw from Sanada and they could not ally themselves with Houjou. But...

“History recreations take priority over school events. For Hashiba, this prevents us from allying ourselves with Houjou. For us, it allows us to complete a history recreation from after Nobunaga’s death.”

“Then will you be doing it?” asked Sakai.

He then asked a sudden question while looking to Sasuke.

“How many are still alive?”

Sasuke took a slow, deep breath before answering.

“Of those from 800 years ago, only 3 Celestial Dragons remain. There are still a lot of Terrestrial Dragons, but not as many as before.”

“Could I visit their graves?”

“Spirit dragons leave no bones behind. The Terrestrial Dragons are different, though. ...Have a drink in their honor in Sanada land.”

“I see.” Sakai’s shoulders lowered. “So we ended up as enemies after all.”

“Testament.”

Masazumi saw Sasuke’s body briefly lower down. He was preparing to take flight and leave. His giant body would spring up and float, but...

“Please wait.”

Musashi’s princess fired a Logismo Oplo at Sasuke.

“Waaaaaaiiiit!!”

The Sanada father and son yelled at them, but Masazumi ignored it. No true Musashi resident would let this surprise them.

...I’m not sure how much I want to be a true Musashi resident, though...

“Masazumi! Why are you hanging your head!?”

But it was not just the one attack.

There were two movements.

The first was Futayo, who stood by Horizon’s side, turning to stand back to back with Horizon and raising Tonbo Spare. She then spoke to Saizou who was reflected in the blade.

“Bind, Tonbo Spare...!”

At the same time, something appeared in the sky.

...Defense barriers!

They appeared in order to separate Sasuke and Saizou from the Musashi group. “Musashi” had lightly raised her hand to protect them. Also...

“I will not allow you to escape. Over.”

The barriers overlapped above Sasuke and Saizou’s heads to form a shallow dome.

Immediately afterwards, the Tachibana Husband raised his voice.

“If this does not hit them, they are the real deal!”

What does that mean? wondered Masazumi just as the result was seen.

Mitotsudaira saw Muneshige fall to his knees with a smile on his face.

Around them, all motion had stopped.

Horizon had fired at about 20% power, Futayo had used Tonbo Spare, and “Musashi” had raised the defense barriers. Those 3 and everyone else spoke in unison: “They’re the real deal...?”

Sasuke and Saizou had entirely vanished. They were gone. And that meant...

...They left?

Nothing remained to answer that question, but...

“Nn.”

Suzu trembled while Kimi embraced her from behind. A moment later, a roar reached them from the distant sky. No, two of them did. The first sounded like ferocious laughter and the other sounded like a great sigh.

“I-it’s those...people...”

Asama looked to her sign frame and nodded in agreement with Suzu’s hesitant interpretation. She showed concern for Suzu while also giving Masazumi and Mitotsudaira a raised-eyebrows look.

“They have withdrawn.”

Mitotsudaira gasped a bit at what Asama said.

“I was able to detect them flying away. But...”

“But?”

“I must investigate the sudden appearance of that one dragon. We have increased our security level, so this is nothing but an embarrassment for the Asama Shrine.”

Asama took a breath and relaxed her shoulders.

Mitotsudaira decided to say something to her.

“U-um...”

Even if she said not to worry about it, further investigation was necessary. Not worrying about it would be weird.

Simply telling her to do her best would probably be best for now, but that felt irresponsible.

Trying to cheer her up with an offer to go eat yakiniku would be perfect, but why did that seem too self-serving? And as she considered all this...

...*Wow...*

Yet again, she was getting trapped by her own harmless but troublesome thoughts.

But then she remembered something.

About half a month before, on the way from IZUMO to Magdeburg, she had been similarly trapped by these endlessly circling thoughts, but she had managed to shake free of them.

“—————”

She thought back to then. She had been unsure what to do about her situation or how to act around Mary, but what had she done in the end?

The memory she found was not a bad one. What she found was...

...*That's right.*

“Tomo.”

Mitotsudaira realized that her personality caused her to hesitate when it came to worries, concerns, and cheering others up. But if it only made her

hesitate, then she only had to look at it this way: ...*It's okay*.

They were classmates and friends. She sometimes found herself questioning their actions, but, well, that was just the kind of relationship it was.

However, that relationship was accompanied by their recognition of each other's skill. So...

"We will leave that to you."

Mitotsudaira would not even know where to start with this and Asama had the necessary skills.

So she would leave it to her. That was all there was to it.

There was no need to hesitate.

"Only you can do this, Tomo. If anything happens, just tell me. I will help to the best of my ability."

The meaning of those words changed Asama's expression. First, her eyebrows rose and she did not seem to understand what she had just been told. But then her eyes narrowed in a smile.

"I can handle it."

"You sure can."

Mitotsudaira looked over to that voice from between Horizon and Futayo. The idiot sat there looking back and forth between Horizon's skirt and the gap in Futayo's skirt. He ignored the two armed girls who glared back at him and he spoke to Asama instead.

"You have a pretty good idea of what this was, don't you?"

"I wouldn't call it a 'pretty good' idea when I have no proof whatsoever."

Asama's words were belied by her light tone. She turned toward Suzu in Kimi's arms.

"Suzu-san, can I ask you about something later?"

"A-about those...p-people?"

"Yes. About them. Also...can I ask you something too, Mary?"

“Judge.” Mary took a step forward from the 1st Special Duty Officer’s side. “There was something that caught my attention about this as well. I think we can figure this out if we all compare what we found odd. And Master Tenzou too...”

“Judge. There was something a little odd about that compared to normal covert ninja techniques. I can at least provide my thoughts on the matter.”

“Heh heh. That settles it then.” Kimi narrowed her eyes toward the distant roars to the west. “We’ll go to Sanada for our study camp. We need to make those dragons cry for mocking us and making Suzu cry.”

“That would be it, yes.”

Masazumi heard a hint of cheerfulness in Sakai’s voice.

He gave a light wave of his hand to tell her to stay here a while longer. And then...

“Hey, Toori.”

“Eh?”

The idiot who had been comparing Horizon and Futayo’s butts was now wrapped in Mitotsudaira’s chains.

“What is it, Principal?” asked the chain-wrapped nudist.

“Well, I can guess how most of this is going to go, so let me tell you as well. ... Go to Sanada for your study camp, Toori. These two will probably go on ahead and prepare the place for you. And then fight the 1st Siege of Ueda.”

“Principal, did Sanada help you out in the past?”

“Judge.”

There was a lot they did not know about Sakai’s past, but there was one thing they had learned on the way here. So Masazumi used that knowledge to make a guess.

“Did you pass through Sanada territory to get to Europe when fighting the Pope-Chancellor?”

“Judge. That’s pretty much it.”

He readily admitted it, but that did not account for Sanada Masayuki’s bowing. What had happened?

“Will we find out when we go there?”

“Masazumi-kun, there’s nothing about a place you can’t figure out by going there, is there?”

Sakai raised the corners of his mouth.

“But,” he continued with a hand on his chin. “I couldn’t figure it out when I was there. Oh, but that was the second time. And I was ordered to go that time.”

“The second time?”

“Judge,” confirmed Sakai as “Musashi” glared at him from his side.

“This is all news to me. Over.”

“Well, you were still just an OS back then, ‘Musashi’-san. Do you want to hear about those times?”

“There is no point in discussing a version of myself that I do not remember. Over.”

Flat Vassal: “Why does she sound so confident that it would be about her?”

Gold Mar: “Are you gonna draw this one, Ga-chan?”

Mal-Ga: “That would be undeniable defiance of authority... But perhaps that would be perfect for a Technohexen.”

“But,” said “Musashi”. “We have our own security in place using our management system as automatons. Since we did not detect this until they were that close, I can only judge it-...”

Just as “Musashi” prepared to say “a failure”, Ohiroshiki raised his hand.

What is this about? wondered Masazumi, so she prompted him to speak with an “ah?”

“Wh-what kind of pathetic prompting was that!?”

“Just say what you have to say.”

“Okay, then.” Ohiroshiki looked to the two from Sanada. “Since this is a pain, couldn’t Uqui-kun torture them until they spill the beans on all the dragons’ techniques and such?”

“W-wait!” Sanada’s Chancellor frantically got up. “Sanada’s reputation is on the line here!”

“Papa! Sacrifice yourself for my safety!”

“Damn you!”

But Neshinbara shook his head and looked to Ohiroshiki.

“We would not look very cool if we-...I mean, that would look bad politically.”

“Did about 80% of your real reason slip out there?”

“Don’t worry about it, Ariadust-kun. ...Now, to get back on topic, if we did that, all of the small nations would grow wary of Musashi. That would be especially bad with how many people should be defecting to Musashi from here on. Even if they were on the run, we do not want Musashi to be seen as a place that forces people to give us their nation’s information.”

“Yes, we can’t have all of our doujinshis being torture ones.”

“Precisely, Naruze-kun. ...Wait, that’s not it at all, Naruze-kun. Please listen.”

“Think before you speak!!”

Everyone yelled at him, but Neshinbara only pushed his glasses up his nose and looked to Masazumi.

“Besides, you know what they are saying, don’t you?”

“I do.” Masazumi nodded and looked to the two from Sanada. “We will still prepare a residence in Mito for Sanada Nobuyuki, but we are visiting Sanada territory for a study camp. I would like for you and Masayuki to return to Sanada territory once more. We will send out a ship, so could you arrange for our arrival in Sanada territory for our study camp?”

“Testament...!” Masayuki bowed his head and forced his son’s head down as well. “If that will help preserve Sanada!”

Masazumi glanced over at Sakai who shrugged and nodded.

The people in front of them were apparently not the type to lie. She had already understood that, but the Principal's confirmation meant a lot.

"Very good."

That was all she said before facing south from the bridge.

There was a sign frame there and she spoke to the boy displayed on it.

"Katagiri Katsumoto. ...Musashi has decided on its destination for the school event. I assume you have no complaints."

Katagiri slowly nodded at the Musashi Vice President's words.

He pictured a map of the Far East from Kantou to Chubu and he thought about the location of the various powers there.

...Sanada is close to Houjou.

They likely intended to head to Houjou after completing their study camp in Sanada.

Kuro-Take: "I think that negotiation turned out well, Katagiri-kun."

That was Takenaka. She was complimenting him, but he had one thing to ask her.

□□凸: "Takenaka-san, were you the one that suggested Sanada recreate the First Siege of Ueda?"

Kuro-Take: "Are you mad?"

"No," answered Katagiri.

□□凸: "It was your instructions that struck back and drove them to action. I was only losing ground."

Kuro-Take: "You prevented Musashi from reducing the length of their study camp, didn't you? It's set at 3 days and 2 nights but with another day and night included for travel. ...Do you have any idea how much funding and personnel it takes to keep an enemy stopped for 3 or more days in war? That's how much

you won us in this single negotiation.”

If so, he was grateful.

...I still have a lot to learn.

Katagiri then began searching for someone beyond Musashi’s Vice President.

Was that shrine maiden there?

He was briefly confused when he saw the Asama Shrine’s gunner shrine maiden, but she was different. The real one was blonde. But...

...She isn’t there.

He could see Musashi’s Chancellor nude but wrapped in chains and being lectured by the silver wolf and others, but what was that about? He thought that boy needed to take his life more seriously.

However...

“Does Musashi intend to complete its study camp before summer break begins?”

“That is our business,” said their Vice President. “We don’t have to tell you.”

“Testament,” he replied. And...

□□凸: “What should I do, everyone? I think we could send someone to that place.”

Llaf: “Even if we could use Takigawa-sama, I do not think we should split up our forces at the moment. ...I believe our only option is to prepare ourselves for the worst and rely on Sanada’s Nobushige faction.”

Tsurugi: “My role leaves me emptyhanded, so once I’m ready, I can head near the border. After all, I can move around if I’m within range of Mori-san’s forces.”

□□凸: “Then please do.”

Tsurugi: “...”

□□凸: “Nagayasu-san?”

Tsurugi: “Eh? ...Oh, um, yes, I’ll do my best. I’ll do my best, okay!?”

Had he said anything to surprise her? At any rate, he sent his acknowledgment and then looked to the *lernen figur*.

To the Musashi forces visible on that screen, they were a large nation. And he was that large nation's agent. He had corrected Musashi when it came to school event equality, so there was one thing he had to say without fear.

"I hope you make some nice memories during your study camp in Sanada, Musashi."

"Judge. To be honest, given who's going, the odds are slim any of the memories will be worth remembering, but that's just how it is. ...You have my thanks for approving this."

Just as she ended the divine transmission, Musashi's Vice President spoke quietly.

"Until we meet again."

"Weren't you being a little too charitable back there, Saizou?"

"Ninja techniques are always found out eventually. The question is what you do afterwards."

A voice responded at cloud level while traveling west.

Sasuke and Saizou, the white and black dragons, tore through the night sky.

They turned their eyeballs backwards in their long slit-like eye sockets to view the Ariake behind them.

Their vision contained the light of the place they had just left.

"Compared to the distant past, mankind has eliminated their anxieties by gathering into groups and surrounding themselves with light."

"Are you a poet now, Sasuke?"

"You have lived as long as I have, so you should understand, too."

Sasuke flapped his 6 main wings to lift himself higher in the sky. Saizou turned his body to increase the air resistance enough to knock his body higher.

Saizou was a little slower, but Sasuke glided to match.

“Mankind’s methods of driving out their anxieties are always a threat to us.”

“Meanwhile, we are anxiety itself to mankind. So are we mankind’s enemy?”

“That cannot be the case. ...How could we coexist in Sanada now if it were?”

“Well.” The strength left Saizou’s voice. “It must be an issue of intelligence and pride. Once we exchange words, we can generally coexist as long as we do not act on emotion. That is what we did and that is why we came here.”

“It’s a little late to ask now...but was remaining in Europe just too much to bear?”

It took several seconds before he answered that question. But...

“You answer first, Sasuke.”

“That was 400 years ago. My memories have faded a fair bit.”

Sasuke used his wings to move out ahead. Saizou followed and tried to fly up alongside him.

The wind loudly struck the dragon’s giant body and Sasuke spoke.

“Being one of mankind’s anxieties is a difficult thing. The Loup Garous must have experienced something similar.”

“Experienced what exactly?”

“Mankind will isolate its most brutal anxieties and allow them to fade. It is a fantastic method. After all...”

Sasuke raised his head somewhat as he looked far into the western sky.

“Those who remained in Europe proudly proclaimed that mankind was ignoring them because they were powerful, but they were really being isolated. ...After all, mankind once defeated the dragons. The isolation was only a way of avoiding something troublesome. We had already been weakened, so nothing would change no matter what we did. Not even fighting us was a way of dealing with us without even viewing giving us the dignity of being their enemy.”

Sasuke breathed a sigh wrapped in ether light.

“The most troublesome thing about mankind is the way they don’t brag about being the strongest of all creatures. We have our pride as a higher being, but that is why we were satisfied with our cage of vainglory.”

“That’s because we’re powerful as individuals,” said Saizou with a tone that said “how many times have we discussed this now?” “They only seem strongest when gathered as a group. And since a group can’t be in absolute agreement, mankind as a whole can’t claim that they’re the strongest. So even as a group, they can’t escape the awareness of how small they are. No matter how many anxieties they drive out, they never think they’re the strongest.”

“Do you pity them?”

“What do you think after living with them?”

“Well,” replied Sasuke. “I do not pity them as individuals or as a group. I suppose they only seem pitiful to me when viewed through my own vainglory.”

“If only you had seen it that way 800 years ago or 400 years ago...Commander of the Gaul Suppression Army.”

“There was no helping that, Subcommander. Did you see that just now? That Loup Garou descendent, that shrine maiden, and the others...they all reminded me of that group that intervened as the Testament Cross-Borders Unit. The ones that prevented us dragons from making a long-term invasion of Europe using the Germanic invasion.”

“There aren’t enough of them and I doubt that knowledge has been passed down.”

Sasuke smiled bitterly at Saizou’s words as they flew through the wind.

“Perhaps they do not see us as all that important.”

“You know, it’s your tendency to be really blunt that made everyone in Europe hate you.”

“You and the rest of the 10 Celestial Dragons that came with me were no different.”

“Now it’s only 3, including you.”

Saizou spat out that comment and eventually spread his wings.

He lowered his altitude in a glide.

“Sorry. I’ll be going on ahead.”

“Testament,” Sasuke replied to Saizou.

But he did not lower his altitude.

Sasuke continued soaring while only looking to the western sky until a voice called out to him.

Of the two at separate altitudes, the lower one spoke into the sky above him.

“Commander, there’s something I’ve noticed over the past 400 years.”

“And what is that?”

“When you fly high into the sky, you always look to the west. And I have a thought on that.”

“...And what is that?”

“Well.” Saizou took a breath. “I think your intent to fight now is born from your intent to have Sanada’s land be the last image you ever see.”

There was no immediate response. But eventually, after the two of them had completely moved apart, Sasuke opened his mouth.

He spoke into the western sky.

“We are Celestial Dragons. From generation to generation, we are born by inheriting the dragon ‘mold’ that was created long ago, so you could call us incarnations of the world itself. ...But finding pride in that would be vainglory. But if we find no pride in it, would that be modesty or the pride of the powerful? The only person who could answer that question was that man who left us 30 years ago.”

His words vanished into the night sky.

“800 years ago and 400 years ago. ...Did I make the right decisions back then?”

Chapter 33: Freedom Lover in the Forest

第三十三章

『森林の自由主義者』

どこまでが確かで
どこまでが遊びか
配点 (振り回され)



How much is certain

And how much is just for fun?

Point Allocation (Being Toyed With)

A large space had moonlight-colored walls, the same colored ceiling, and a wooden floor.

It was a dining hall.

The wall was engraved with the gourd emblem indicating it was a Hashiba ship.

The rectangular tables and the chairs all bore M.H.R.R.'s mark and the menu *lernen figur* floating above the tables contained a clock saying it was 1 AM.

The dining hall was currently only being used by those on break or performing routine duties.

Someone with blonde hair walked through those with night duty. It was Kiyomasa who had just completed the early night shift.

She had arrived in search of a light snack, but...

"Oh? Takenaka-sama, are you going over today's battle results? Hashiba-sama's unit has arrived from K.P.A. Italia. That means Wakisaka-sama, Yasuharu-sama, and Katagiri-sama have joined us. Did you have that information?"

"Oh, tes, tes. They all dropped by to greet me earlier. Katagiri-kun seems to have had a rough time as a negotiator."

"Hashiba-sama apparently had a rough time of it as well. And right in the middle of an adjustment phase for her."

While wearing a long shirt and tights, Kiyomasa regulated her breathing so her chest would not stick out. And she looked to Takenaka's hands.

...It doesn't look like she intends to talk about the battle results...

That was partially because she was focused on her work, but Takenaka had originally dealt with accounting, so she did not draw any inferences before

arriving at the conclusion. She always completed her work swiftly and made her decision only after viewing the result.

So while she was willing to chat, she would not make any inferences about what she was working on.

Kiyomasa bowed toward no one in particular and went to get some tea from the counter. She also took a summer orange tart.

“Kiyomasa-kun. Me too.”

“Do you want the same thing?”

“Grab two extras.”

Eh? she thought as she looked back, but she soon found the answer.

Someone was resting their head and sleeping on a table in the opposite corner from the entrance she had used.

It was Katagiri.

...Oh, dear.

He had apparently come here to eat after finishing his negotiations and arriving here.

With Takenaka as the commander, this ironclad ship had long been used by the Ten Spears. Hashiba would move around the Far East for diplomatic purposes, so she was often not around, but there was generally someone in the mobile academy, in the dining hall, or on the deck.

Perhaps as a special treat from the usual head cook, Katagiri's plate contained a heaping portion of leftover eisbein as well as some sauerkraut and a wooden container of rice. However, he had not touched any of it and slept with a *lernen figur* open. The sleepiness must have hit him when he was checking something like Takenaka.

Kiyomasa placed a tart plate on the table next to him and then Takenaka sent a hollow voice her way.

“Tell him Hashiba-kun was thankful for his negotiation.”

“Why don’t you tell him, Takenaka-san?”

“I’m not as close to him as the rest of you are.”

Kiyomasa did not think Takenaka needed to keep that distance, but everyone had a different comfort zone. So she decided to send Katagiri a divine mail and returned to Takenaka.

“Trouble sleeping?” asked Takenaka.

“I’m fine. I can use a spell to sleep at any time if I have to.”

“That’s a relief.”

Kiyomasa placed a tart plate next to Takenaka. The girl had a bandanna holding down her bangs and she immediately grabbed the tart with her right hand and took a bite.

“My. Takenaka-sama, don’t you want a fork?”

“This cuts out the effort of washing it. I’m not showing off my navel for no reason.”

“Oh, you’re being economical. But please don’t throw up what you eat.”

“I can’t really help that... I grew up in a mountain castle, so I have trouble with the sky.”

Digging too deep into this would interrupt her thoughts, so Kiyomasa grabbed her own tart.

“How does it taste?”

“Did you make them, Kiyomasa-kun?”

“I chose them.”

“It’s sour.”

They apparently were made with good summer oranges. She thought it was improper to eat while standing up, but Kiyomasa still took a bite of the tart. She stuck the point of the slice into her mouth, which seemed like a fresh new way to eat one.

“It really is nice and sour.”

“Do you like them? You are often eating tarts. Then is that the way to get them to grow...?”

“If you are referring to breasts, I can only say it’s a matter of your build and predisposition... Oh, but I do like tarts. I have a prominent memory of one. I think it was handmade by my mother.”

That received no response.

Had she interrupted Takenaka’s thoughts and work? She did not know. But Takenaka said something else instead as she opened a *lernen figur* and inputted some bar graph data.

“Trouble sleeping?”

Takenaka asked the same thing as before. But Kiyomasa knew she was not the type to ask the same thing twice. So she nodded and looked to Takenaka’s hands.

“Everyone seems to be too excited to sleep.”

“We didn’t win the battle and we were actually toyed with if anything, but the fact that we returned alive and the awareness of the experience we gained will provide greater self-confidence than even a victory would.”

Takenaka pushed up on one of the bar graphs with a finger to add to its length.

“Do you think this is right?”

That was very like Takenaka who did not make guesses.

...She asks if “this is right”, not if “this is about right”.

Aware of that, Kiyomasa nodded and spoke

“If you used what I said to adjust it, then I think the addition to the graph is correct.”

“Thanks.”

With her action validated, Takenaka continued her work.

As seen here, Takenaka's work was more than just money and mass measured in definite numbers. She included her own feelings in it. But that feeling only sought an increase or decrease in the amount. It did not seek a definite amount or absolute correctness.

If she began comparing the numbers, she would get distracted by that.

...The people below her can decide on the numbers.

Takenaka was their lead commander. What mattered was that she understood the entire situation and had the right people to delegate the details to.

They were replete with personnel and they could rely on others for the tasks they could not complete themselves. Takenaka had often taught them that. Thus...

"What do you think of my charge toward the side of the enemy god of war unit during the morning battle?"

"If you could have prepared a decoy and diversion, you might have been able to target the god of war unit from behind."

That "if you could have" part was Takenaka's style of mercy and strictness.

"I will do my best," said Kiyomasa with a nod.

At that very moment, the dining hall's lights went out and an alarm blared.

"Unidentified high-speed shell detected off the starboard side!"

Only the emergency lighting and their *lernen figurs* lit the dining hall and the only sounds were the alarm and the rustling of people bracing for impact.

Meanwhile, Kiyomasa fixed her collar, placed the rest of the tart on the plate, and listened to the divine transmission voice.

"Incoming!"

Outside the dining hall window, several layers of defense barriers glowed as they shattered.

And the people in the dining hall heard the sound of something thin breaking.

"Shell identified! It was a natural object! A 30m tree! The enemy is..."

Kiyomasa knew the answer. There was only one person who could make an attack like that.

This had happened before as well.

...Throwing a massive object that can't be detected with an ether scan.

Who could do that? While continuing her work, Takenaka scratched her head and answered.

“Would that be the Reine des Garous?”

Still Got It: “Hee hee. They seem to be panicking a fair bit.”

Shining Army: “Was all that throwing you did on the K.P.A. Italia border setting up for this?”

Still Got It: “If you look at it that way, does it increase my value?”

Shining Army: “It is true that way is more convenient for us. ...I'll spread that story.”

The M.H.R.R. and Hashiba vanguard fleet had entered a defensive formation on a grassy field in the forest.

They had advanced around 7km northwest since the morning battle. A tall forest rose up on the left and right and they were surrounded by a shallow mountain range, but...

“That's why we were able to send the fleet forward to search for the enemy!”

On the deck of the ironclad ship moored at the front of the grassy field, people in mobile shells and M.H.R.R. uniforms walked around while holding up night vision *lernen figurs* like visors.

Their visual data was the only way to respond to the enemy. That was partially due to the dark environment during the night, but more importantly...

“They're using natural objects instead of shells, so our ether scans are useless!”

A high-speed shell produced a great noise because it broke the sound barrier when fired. In contrast, a thrown object that never broke the sound barrier would not produce such a loud noise.

They were using sound-gathering spells to pick out the sound of the rustling branches of the thrown trees, but...

“Damn, it’s no use with all the noise from the forest creatures!”

They then noticed something floating in the night air beyond the tall forest.

“Here it comes!”

By the time they realized it was a large tree, it was high above their heads.

Some of its branches had broken, but the roots were still attached as it flew artlessly through the air.

They could hear it coming. The tree and its branches shook as they struck the air and the leaves rustled. And...

“Figure out where it’s going!!”

A few students held the spell visors to their eyes and raised their right hands to confirm they had the answer.

And as soon as the word “transmit” flew from their visors, two lights appeared.

One was the light of the defense barriers that appeared in the sky.

The other was the cannon fire launched at the source of the thrown object from a turretless ether cannon on the side of the ship.

The defensive light shattered in the sky, but the tree was not broken. The ultra-massive object lost its speed, but it fell straight down from there.

Meanwhile, the attack launched on the enemy flew in an arc.

Even if it was an ether cannon, the turretless cannon from P.A. Oda fired a highly-tracking blast. The Garuda riding the glowing shell corrected its course via surfing and then sent the shot towards its final destination with a kick.

“Damn! The trees are in the way!”

The shell had been fired from quite a steep angle, but the forest was very tall. It knocked down a few trees before arriving at the ground where the enemy was.

It did not reach them.

Meanwhile, the enemy moved quickly away and launched another attack.

“Another tree is coming! Determine its location!”

All they could do in response was block the flying objects and fire back.

That was all. They had personnel, they had defense barriers, and they had ether cannons, so they would be fine. But...

“Damn...! How long is this going to keep going!?”

Everyone on the ship was bound by the forest and sky to starboard.

All of them knew the purpose of this situation.

“Are they trying to wear down the frontline warriors!?”

Kiyomasa listened to Takenaka’s words while changing in the equipment storeroom connected to her own room.

Takenaka was working as usual, but she seemed to understand the current situation.

“Shibata-kun would often do this. He would fire blank shells so his enemy couldn’t sleep.”

“But these aren’t blanks. This can actually damage us, so it’s a lot more troublesome.”

“Yes, yes. And that’s why we have to head out and fight back. We’re up against the Reine des Garous who doesn’t mind working at night and she’s gathering her ammunition on site, but she’s forcing us to dedicate some personnel to a serious counterattack. From the perspective of wartime cost performance, she is in a far superior position.”

Takenaka continued with an “And you know what?”

Kiyomasa stripped off her shirt, put on an inner suit starting from the bottom, and fastened it at the stomach and chest.

“What?”

“Testament. This is about morale, which can’t be quantitatively measured, but...”

“Are you saying their morale is quite high, whether we’re talking about the Reine des Garous alone or Hexagone Française as a whole?”

“What do you think?”

Kiyomasa could not immediately answer. Takenaka was working, but Kiyomasa was changing. She quickly fixed the chest cloth in place and fastened it on up to the collar.

...Kh.

They seemed heavier and more cramped than that morning, but was she just imagining that? Or was there some secret to that tart?

At any rate, Kiyomasa forced the inner suit closed up to her neck.

“Personally, I think we’re being toyed with here.”

She knew it was dangerous to come up with her own image of the enemy, but when she compared the enemy to them...

“I wonder if she thinks this way is easier.”

“What makes you say that?”

“The enemy is not changing her tactics. She simply throws attacks in from long range and lets us respond. That means she’s set this up so we have to deal with her this entire time. That suggests she thinks we will not be able to resist or fight back very much. ...Now let me ask you, Takenaka-sama: What do you think will happen to us if the enemy keeps this up?”

“We’ll be utterly exhausted.”

Takenaka’s tone really sold that opinion, but was that because she was working?

“We’re in unfamiliar enemy territory. The morning’s battle ended in a baffling

way. Everyone is relying on this frontline fleet. And now the Reine des Garous's ridiculous presence is forcing us into a defense-focused response. ...Even the people following behind will be worn out by the anxiety of it all."

"...What did Hashiba-sama say?"

"She said she's been making some decisions about this but we need to keep working a little longer."

"You mean...?"

Kiyomasa unlatched the waist armor and removed it from the wall.

"Trees aren't the only thing in the forest," said Takenaka.

A moment later, a solid sound shook the sky.

...A stone!?

That was something else found in the forest. And the sounds of them being thrown and destroyed sounded like rain pounding on the ship's exterior armor.

"Kh..."

I need to hurry, she decided as she grabbed the waist armor in both hands and stood tall, pushing out her chest.

That caused the inner suit to burst open at her chest, opening down to below her navel. She let out a shriek, but more due to the cold air reaching her skin than the opening clothing itself.

"Umm."

While listening to the alarm rise to the emergency level, she opened a *lernen figur*.

"Hello, Katagiri-sama? This is a little hard to say, but... Yes, it's an emergency, so... Yes, I'd like some help getting my armor on. Could you do that for me? Eh? Oh, no, no. I won't force you..."

The new objects flying through the night sky were not just large trees.

They were stones that two adult men would only just barely be able to carry,

and...

“Those are materials for building a military camp!”

And that was not all. The moonlight illuminated what looked like pieces of human bodies.

“Those are light god of war parts!”

This all pointed to a certain fact.

“Was there an Hexagone Française camp set up around here!?”

They had searched for enemies before stopping the fleet here. A scout unit primarily made up of P.A. Oda warriors had supposedly checked everything as far away as the trees and boulders which were being thrown. But...

“The Reine des Garous could probably carry something like that in from a distance...”

“Hey! Don’t worry us like that! Now, how far away are we talking here!?”

“If you don’t want to be worried, y-you really shouldn’t ask that.”

“W-well, I’m worried regardless.”

Perhaps to distract themselves from their worries, the boys discussed the situation like small children. When the girls saw that, they sighed, looked up into the night sky, and held a discussion of their own.

“So do her breasts give her more inertia for throwing things?”

“If anything, wouldn’t it be her height? Not that I have either.”

“I’ve seen images of the Reine des Garous’s husband and he’s pretty cute.”

“He really is,” someone agreed. “She’s tall, she has a large chest, she has a slender waist, she has a cute husband, she smashed a portion of IZUMO, and she held back Sassa-sama of our Five Great Peaks...”

Honestly.

“Is that monster just toying with us here?”

They looked up in the sky again to see the first tree in a while.

It was large. It was a size thicker and longer than the previous ones. After they

all confirmed its presence, they set up the defense barriers, and...

“...Eh?”

They heard a solid sound from just in front of the tree.

The tree's silhouette had been used as camouflage for the object thrown with it.

“A rock!”

“No, a stone!”

“Technically, it's a boulder.”

“Oh, shut up!” they all shouted as the glowing defense barriers broke and the solid fragments scattered.

The hunk of rock was caught before anything and it shattered.

It broke apart.

But as the pieces of rock rained down on the deck, the giant tree remained intact.

Its speed and angle remained unchanged.

If they had been able to respond quickly, it would not have been a problem. But even if they were slow...

“Starboard side! It's going to fall into the camp around the ship!”

There were materials and guard personnel there. They had already noticed the situation overhead and the people below had begun to evacuate to the ship, but...

“Not good...!”

The tree was more than 50m long. And due to its angle...

“It's going to fall on us after it hits!”

Of course, the ironclad ship was 800m long. It was more than 100m tall, so even if a 50m tree fell on them...

“Don't worry! That won't be an obstacle to us!”

The girl who had detected the situation around the ship displayed the result of the fallen tree on a diagram of the ship.

It showed...

“Even if this one hits, the secondary cannons on the bow can-...”

She trailed off.

But not because the tree had been caught by the defense barriers overhead.

“Ah...”

Three more large trees were flying toward the bow.

The one would definitely fall on the deck at that angle, but the other three...

“They’re being used to block the bow’s secondary cannons!!”

Defense barriers opened in the sky, but those glowing panels were shattered by something.

It was not a stone. Nor was it a tree. It was not even the materials or *Grösse Panzer* parts from before.

“...A cannon blast!?”

It was a volley of anti-ship cannon fire.

“Does the Reine des Garous have a god of war unit working with her!?”

Someone asked that on the deck as the shellfire raced through the sky between the forest and them.

These sharp sounds shaking the night sky were different from the previous noises.

They reverberated across the forest.

The shells were fired along ballistic paths from the distance and they came from several distinct locations. And they passed below the flying trees.

“The defense barriers are going to break!”

The ones opened over the bow did indeed shatter. At the same time, the

large trees fell toward the bow.

“Kh,” someone groaned. “What happens if these cover the bow’s secondary cannons and the bow’s deck!?”

“The enemy will only attack from the starboard bow!”

Hearing that from the girl checking on their surroundings, everyone looked up.

The large trees were directly overhead and above the bow. The defense barriers would not arrive in time.

“Will they be too late!?”

Just as that voice reached the sky, a silhouette was launched into the moonlit heavens above.

They heard sounds of breaking and vibrations. Four in all.

“Ah...”

The large trees broke apart into countless pieces.

The four of them were destroyed in an instant.

The giant trees split apart like they were flowers.

A power pierced them from the roots to the top of the trunk.

That piercing force ran straight until it pushed out the moisture-rich trunk from within, causing it to split outwards.

No two trees split apart in the same way, but once the destruction reached the branches and leaves, it rapidly divided into smaller pieces. The splitting returned to the roots as they submitted to the influence of the trunk as it continued to swell out from within.

So with an area near the center as the foundation, the entire tree swelled out in two parts and then burst.

The tearing noise sounded like fibers ripping and separating. The splitting noise sounded like the creaking of a maw opening too wide.

The trunks blossomed.

Then the entire trees were no more than small fibers as the torn branches flew everywhere.

All that remained were the scattering leaves and...



脇坂・安治

加藤・嘉明

“We made it in time, Angie.”

“Yes, we did, Kime-chan.”

...voices. Two girls called out to each other.

A round ship's bridge existed on the back of the ironclad ship. The two figures standing on top of it each had 6 wings and held long cannons.

The cannons were longer than 5m and were made of panels.

The long cannons had few definite joints and were instead made by fitting the panels together. As for the colors...

“Angie, what should we do?”

The one with gold wings had a white cannon and clothing.

“Isn't this good enough?”

The one with black wings had a black cannon and clothing.

They simply looked at each other. Everyone on the deck spoke their names in unison.

“Ten Spears #4 and #5, Gold Katou Yoshiaki and Black Wakisaka Yasuharu...”

Gold and black. The combination of those two colors was known as...

“Zwei Eisen...”

“That's right,” said gold-winged Yoshiaki. “We didn't arrive in time for the morning battle, but we can take you on now. ...Then again, it doesn't look like we'll be needed.”

As soon as Yoshiaki said that with a smile, a sword slash was sent out from the deck and to the starboard forest.

It was a great sword of light. Black-winged Yasuharu looked back as she spoke its name.

“Caledfwlch. ...Kiyo-chan, aren't you a little late?”

From atop the ironclad ship's bridge, Kiyomasa had sent her glowing sword to the position from which the final tree had been thrown.

...Did I make it in time?

The question was whether or not the enemy was there.

She thought she had made a complete surprise attack, but she did not detect the tactile feedback that should have been present had the enemy not dodged it.

Llaf: “How did it go?”

Kiyo-Massive: “I missed...I think.”

Llaf: “It is not often that thou miss, Kiyo-dono.”

AnG: “Yeah, those boobs are really in the way...”

She glared over at Yasuharu and Yoshiaki and then heard a voice from below.

“W-wait, Kiyomasa-san, don’t move! The fastener will come undone!”

She had needed to get out here in a hurry, so she had let Katagiri attach her armor. But while Katagiri operated her waist hard point with one hand, he held his headphones to his ears while linking them to the ship’s sensors.

“...They’re gone?”

“Did they withdraw?”

When she asked that, Katagiri remained motionless to check what he could hear through the headphones.

But after a while...

“We should be fine. ...I don’t hear the cries of the moving animals anymore.”

He stood up and spoke to everyone on the deck.

“I think we are safe for at least a range of 3km. So use this chance to-...”

The ship shook below their feet.

“Oh,” said everyone on the deck as they lightly spread their legs.

The ship had begun to rise. The reason why was shown on a large *lernen figur* that opened above the deck. The screen was made so the attacker in the starboard forest would be able to see it.

“Hashiba-sama, are you okay?”

Even if she was in front of everyone, Kiyomasa did not hesitate to show concern about Hashiba’s health.

Concern for one’s superiors was not something most armies would allow to be seen.

...But it would be best if we shared this.

Everyone understood that Hashiba had great power and was very decisive. From there, they had to balance the scales between the people who could rely on her and those who could protect her.

And they chose...

“We can take command here, so please don’t push yourself too hard.”

“No, I-I’m fine. Testament. Um, I was just making some adjustments to my body, so I got some rest while preparing for that. And, um, everyone?”

“Testament!”

The response came not just from the deck but from within the ship as well.

Hashiba bowed in response.

“We seem to be in a worrisome spot for the other side. It would be dangerous to ascend too far, so we are going to shift the ships a bit to the southwest...to the left, okay?”

Sure enough, their view began to move to the side.

More than a wind, it was like a dense patch of air gently enveloped them as it passed from left to right. “Ohh,” said everyone on the deck.

“Hey, wait. The ship’s moving a lot more carefully than normal.”

“That’ll be because it’s on Hashiba-sama’s instructions.”

“I hope Takenaka-sama is okay.”

I’m fairly certain she is anything but okay, calmly decided Kiyomasa as she looked back toward the fleet behind them.

The 7 ships behind them were moving in the same way.

This would place the vast grassy field between them and the enemy in the starboard forest. If the enemy pursued the ships, they would have to expose themselves on the open field.

“Please stop the ships above the left forest such that the bottom of the ships just about touches the trees below. That will cost fuel, but we can now receive an ether fuel supply through a ley line divine transmission.”

Everyone looked up at that.

They were receiving an ether supply through the ley lines.

This was the system that Shibata’s forces had used to bring their Testamenta Arma into other nations and to receive emergency supplies. This would be crucial for the attack on Mouri and everyone had heard it was being prepared, but...

“We’re using it here, Hashiba-sama?”

“Testament. It was designed with times like this in mind. There is a supply source nearby.”

Once Hashiba said that, another *lernen figur* appeared to the right of hers. It displayed a man with the starry sky in the background.

“Hi, good evening. Are you doing well?”

“Emperor-Chancellor...!”

It was Matthias.

Katagiri noticed that the fastener on Kiyomasa’s side had come undone and her skin was visible through the opening.

...I should probably warn her about that...

He got down on one knee while wondering what to do.

Everyone on the deck did the same. Next to him, Kiyomasa set Caledfwlch aside and raised her head.

“Hashiba-sama, will this supply be provided by the Emperor-Chancellor?”

“Umm.”

Hashiba did not know where Matthias’s *lernen figur* was in relation to hers. She looked up, down, left, and right before finally looking back toward Kiyomasa.

“How should we do this, Matthias-san?”

“First, could you stop kneeling like that? You’re on alert, aren’t you? Also, y’know, when a puppet shows up, it’s just because he wants to be pampered. ... Right now, I’m just greeting you concerning the ether supply you want and I’m the one that wants to bow my head low so I can continue being a puppet. If you don’t pick up on that, then I’m not really a puppet. Then I become a supplier or a proper emperor. Got that?”

“Testament,” said gold-winged Yoshiaki as she raised her long cannon and stood up. “That was good, Emperor. You did well. Now keep it up while you hand over the fuel.”

“Yes! That’s it! If you don’t keep acting like that, I won’t be a puppet emperor. You all need to treat me like that. Yes, I will be truly happy if I can be emperor in exchange for a bit of fuel. Being a puppet is nice and easy!! Call me as soon as you’re out of fuel or food.”

...The Emperor-Chancellor is kind of amazing.

After all, Matthias’s behavior went far beyond modesty.

Katagiri had never seen anyone else who was so optimistically obsequious. But...

□□凸: “The fuel itself belongs to K.P.A. Italia, doesn’t it?”

AnG: “Testament. K.P.A. Italia’s trade cities are offering ether fuel in lieu of giving up control of their trade to the Emperor-Chancellor.”

Since Itsukushima had fallen, K.P.A. Italia lacked the military might to resist them. Instead, they were working to increase their trade power which, since the Age of Discovery, had fallen behind that of the nations bordering the ocean. They were shifting focus to local trade with the Middle East and the

Mediterranean and they were gaining income from the brand-name products that had been developed as a result.

Money was preserving them. But...

Kuro-Take: “They are accumulating money through trade, and once they have enough money, they can buy ether fuel from other nations. That lets them adjust the amount of their own currency while also allowing them to support and donate to other nations without disturbing the other nations’ interest rates. ...And by sending us the fuel they have bought, they don’t have to waste their own reserves.”

Merchants and nations had a variety of ways of describing this sort of thing, but one phrase in particular came to Katagiri’s mind.

...Give and take.

Because Hashiba and Matthias had already prepared the infrastructure within M.H.R.R., the ether fuel supply and transportation could be carried out quite swiftly. When sending objects or information, it was often faster to route it through M.H.R.R. instead of sending it directly from K.P.A. Italia to Hexagone Française.

In this case, it was possible to receive supplies through a ley line divine transmission in an emergency.

They were waging war using the supply line that created.

Matthias was the central figure in this plan.

He was a puppet, but he put in all the effort and arrangements he needed to be a puppet.

He would often do as much work as a Cabinet Minister or Committee Head and claim it was all just “to be a puppet”. Even now, he seemed to be holding a diplomatic meeting, as Hashiba pointed out: “Are you viewing the stars with Pope-Chancellor Olimpia, Matthias-san?”

“Testament.” Matthias smiled bitterly. “She said she wanted to perform the star fortunetelling method developed by Professor Galileo. And it turns out she does not know which stars are which.”

Honestly.

“The emperor is obsequiously teaching things to the pope... It’s almost like the pope recognizes my right as emperor thanks to this, which is simply wonderful. Even among puppets, I have made myself into a puppet.”

“Have the stars told you anything?”

Matthias answered Hashiba’s casual question with a slight smile.

“There is an omen in the west and the east.”

“An omen...?”

Katagiri spoke up without thinking, so Matthias turned toward him.

“Do you know what that means?”

“No, um...”

Today seemed to be his day for speaking with people ranked far above him. He longed to be back with that shrine maiden who was only a normal student.

But he also realized what Matthias meant.

When Matthias had asked if he knew what that meant, he had not been asking about the meaning of the omen. After all...

“That means you don’t know whether it was a good omen or an ill omen, doesn’t it?”

“Testament. Exactly right. Then do you know what that means?”

“Testament. It means the world is splitting in two. Most likely, your view of the stars is an objective one, not a subjective one. So I would suspect that, to the entire world, this can be seen as both a good omen and an ill omen, depending on your point of view.”

“Splendid.”

Katagiri blushed at Matthias’s praise.

He suppressed the urge to modestly reject the compliment. After all...

“As the puppet emperor, I am so glad I can act like a proper puppet by simply providing the facts without having to think about it myself. If I come off as too

skilled, I would no longer be a puppet. But if I come off as incompetent, I would just be a nuisance to all of you. However,” he said. “So that I might remain a puppet for as long as possible, I am praying that this omen in the east and west is a good omen for all of you.”

Chapter 34: Recipients of the Lap Palace

第三十四章

『膝上御殿の享受者達』



気づいて下さい
配点 (幸いなのです)

Please notice

Point Allocation (I Am Happy)

Masazumi sighed as she looked out the window and into the night sky.

She was in the Student Council Room on the 3rd floor of the academy.

It was 1 AM, but the members of the Student Council, Chancellor's Officers, and others were lying or sitting on the tatami mat floor.

They had just finished eating the bentos they had ordered and they were now taking a break.

Those who had been up top had to be exhausted. Since they had been a part of the negotiations after that, they were now sleeping on the floor. Naomasa had been in the engine division instead of dealing with the negotiation, so she must have been able to catch a nap earlier.

"What's everyone sleeping all over the floor for? Couldn't they at least take a bath first?"

Even as she said that, Crossunite and Mary were covering them all with the blankets they had brought in.

"Naomasa, your bento is over there."

"Judge. The Asama Shrine ones have a weariness-reducing divine protection added to the included sake, so I'll wait until later."

And then...

"You too, Asama-chi?"

Asama was sleeping in a half-sitting position with the empty bento boxes stacked up next to her. And she had two people using her lap as a pillow: "Aoi and Horizon were on the receiving end of all sorts of scolding from Asama. But..."

"But?"

"Well...you know how Horizon is. After using the Logismoi Oplo so often, she needed to sleep to optimize herself. Aoi initially said he would crossdress and

lend her his lap, but the sleepiness won out and this was the result. From there, Asama and then Kimi fell asleep.”

Asama had placed her track suit over the two sleeping on her lap and she had the Aoi Sister’s track suit top placed over her. The Aoi Sister was sleeping while clinging to Asama’s butt and she had Mitotsudaira’s track suit top placed over her.

Mitotsudaira was still awake, but she was clearly starting to nod off.

“Mitotsudaira, we have blankets now, so you can use one to sleep.”

“Aeh? ...Oh, I-I’m fine.”

“Do you think you’re the night watchwoman?” asked Naomasa as she handed Mitotsudaira three blankets.

“Three?”

“One for those three, one for Asama-chi, and one for you.”

Sure enough, that would work. The idiot was sleeping face-up and Asama’s left breast was functioning something like an eye mask, but it must have been an accident with no impure thoughts behind it because Hanami did not react while taking care of some leftover work on Asama’s shoulder.

Mitotsudaira placed a blanket over the three lying on the floor and placed one over Asama. She wrapped it around Asama’s front side which hid Aoi and the others, but was that done out of a knightly desire to protect her king?

She then placed the final blanket over her own shoulders and sat next to Aoi, but...

“Mito, Toori’s arm is sticking out to the side there.”

“I-I am not going to lick his hand!”

“I was actually trying to suggest you use his arm as a pillow, but suit yourself.”

Mitotsudaira blushed, but she showed no sign of leaving Aoi’s side.

...Yeah.

This may have been the battle formation Horizon had mentioned.

It only looked like Horizon, Asama, and that group were with Aoi, but in fact...

“Oh, Futayo is over there.”

She was asleep while sprawled out on the floor by the entrance. That was likely her position as Horizon’s guard. When someone walked down the hall, she would grab Tonbo Spare’s shaft in her sleep, making a troubling noise. It was just like Crossunite to have intentionally kept the blanket off of her dominant hand when placing it over her.

The Tachibana Couple seemed to be taking a break after eating their bentos beyond the partition placed at the entrance, and the others were much the same.

...Crossunite, Urquiaga, Neshinbara, Bertoni, and the others are here too.

Those were late night group.

Having finished distributing the blankets, Crossunite and Mary were finally starting on the bentos they had not eaten before. Neshinbara was writing up a report on the events of the day. As soon as Bertoni had arrived, he had said “This is my desk, isn’t it?”, chosen one of the two lined up there, and set up a locking spell and other things while communicating with Augesvarer via divine transmission.

It was unusual for all of the officers to be gathered like this.

Noriki, Persona-kun, Ohiroshiki, and some others who held no office were out across Musashi for their respective jobs, but that too was...

“A battle formation, hm?”

With that comment, Masazumi relaxed her shoulders.

With Aoi as the leader...well, he is the leader, isn’t he? Technically, at least? Maybe? At any rate he was at the center and the others either took up position close to him or around him. They had created those positions for themselves even if they were not aware of it.

...Is my position over there?

Masazumi thought about her position within the geometric pattern formed by tatami mats and blankets.

With bento in hand, Naomasa sighed and approached the windowsill where Masazumi stood.

“...Toh.”

She sat sideways in the windowsill space as if placing herself inside the window frame. She stuck her left half out the window, but she held onto the window frame with her right false arm.

“Keep up the good work,” she said.

“You can eat inside.”

“I might have a smoke and Adele and Suzu don’t like the smell.”

“I see,” said Masazumi as she turned to see Balfette and Mukai sleeping alongside the Satomi Student Council President. They were by the wall nearest Aoi’s group. But...

“...What is going on there?” asked Naomasa.

Mukai was collapsed in a shallow S-shape with her arms overhead, Yoshiyasu’s head rested on her left hip, and Balfette covered her from right belly to chest.

Masazumi thought back on what had happened.

“At first, the Satomi Student Council President felt sleepy and borrowed Mukai’s lap. Balfette was watching her sleep and almost instantly fell asleep herself. Mukai couldn’t support them and collapsed, so she just gave up and fell asleep herself.”

“Yeah, Suzu has a way of letting people do whatever they want if she trusts them.” There was a slight smile in Naomasa’s voice. She grabbed some food with her chopsticks as she spoke. “This is sort of made for someone on a diet, isn’t it? Instead of a lot of food, it makes you use your chopsticks more often.”

“Oh, so it makes you feel like you ate more than you did?”

“I guess you wouldn’t notice since you take small bites regardless, Masazumi.”

Is that true? she wondered.

Naomasa then asked a question while grabbing some boiled sweet potato.

“What are we going to do now?”

“Well.” Masazumi responded to Naomasa’s question. “Sanada’s Principal has already gone ahead to Sanada territory because he has to get everything in order for our arrival. Sanada’s Chancellor should be staying in our diplomatic building to complete the process on our end. ...With their help, the plan is for the Musashi to leave the Ariake early tomorrow morning and arrive in Sanada territory by evening.”

“Judge, judge. And once we arrive, it’s 4 days and 3 nights for the study camp, right?”

Naomasa used voice input to convert Masazumi’s explanation to text and then did some typing to fix a conversion mistake. She likely intended to inform the engine division. That said...

...There’s no real point in telling the engine division this.

“While moving around, we’ll be taking exams in the mornings and having physical examinations and such in the afternoons, so prepare yourself.”

“...So this *study* camp is going to be more about testing than studying, is it?”

Masazumi looked over to see Naomasa grabbing more of her bento. *You take pretty small bites yourself*, she thought before correcting the other girl.

“We’re students, so we have to take care of our schoolwork first.”

“I’ve never liked schoolwork. I find war a lot more exciting and fun.”

Naruze sleepily sat up and moved her unsteady right hand as if writing in the air.

“Kindred...spirits?”

After writing out those invisible words, Naruze collapsed back onto the floor.

Naomasa looked past her prosthetic arm and at the others.

“Are those idiots going to be okay?”

“I’d say that they’re idiots, they’re okay, and they’re also dangerous.”

“Saying that isn’t going to fix them.”

Naomasa was quite strict. Could she say that because she had known them for so long?

The word “old friends” came to mind, so Masazumi asked a question.

“Where do you think Principal Sakai is planning to take us?”

“Huh? How would I know?”

“You’re from Kantou, aren’t you? You can’t make any guesses?”

“I’m from south Kantou while Sanada is in central Kantou. This was the first I’d heard of Principal Sakai having friends in Sanada. It does make sense that he would’ve used it as a route on the way to Europe. But...”

“Can you think of anything?”

“You know as well as I do, don’t you? Before he came to Musashi, Principal Sakai was demoted and sent to Edo for failing to stop the suicide of Lord Motonobu’s younger brother. He said he went around visiting some ruins.”

“—————”

That reminded Masazumi.

...That’s right.

Back at Mikawa, he had indeed mentioned that when disembarking.

And at the time, he had said...

“He caused the name inheritor of Lord Motonobu’s heir to commit suicide...”

“Judge. Lord Motonobu’s younger brother had inherited the name of his heir: Matsudaira Nobuyasu.”

That was not the end of the story.

While speaking with Sanada Masayuki, Sakai had first said...

...There’s nothing about a place you can’t figure out by going there, is there?

And then he had said...

...I couldn’t figure it out when I was there. Oh, but that was the second time.

And I was ordered to go that time.

“The second time?”

“I’d assume the first time was on his way to Europe,” said Naomasa.

“Judge,” replied Masazumi as she thought about this. If that was his first time, “The second time would have been...when he was visiting ruins after being demoted and sent to Edo.”

“Probably. And if that demotion was the ‘order’ he mentioned, whose order was it? And what for? That’s a bit of a mystery.”

“I see,” said Masazumi with a nod. But then she heard a sudden voice.

“Um, M-Mary-dono?”

It was Crossunite.

Tenzou was faced with a new experience.

He had never before come across this situation.

...Dealing with a drunk busty blonde!

Mary sat in front of him and turned her unfocused eyes toward him.

Her face was red, and occasionally...

“Nn.”

She would tremble as if hiccupping.

What had caused this? The sake, obviously.

The Asama Shrine’s bentos came with sake. That sake of course contained a weariness-reducing divine protection and it would not get you drunk even if you drank it like sake. The intoxication would be purified away as a burden on the body.

But it had been a poor match for a spirit-user like Mary.

The sake spirits that lived in the sake had permeated her body after the weariness was removed. The intoxication would normally be removed as a burden and the sake spirits would be weak enough to ignore.

...But she must have welcomed the contents of the sake in order to help remove her weariness.

Mary could normally drink wine, ales, refined sake, or shochu. She had grown up in Europe, so she had a greater tolerance for alcohol than Tenzou did.

But now she was drunk, even if only a little. As for why...

...That would be due to the burden of the battle.

Their lives really had been on the line this time. And Tenzou remembered that Mary had cried when she came to rescue him. “That ninja” was still the 5th most searched term on the divine network. *I can’t take this lightly.* But...

“Listen, Master Tenzou.”

“J-judge.”

“Good. You listened.”

...What was the point of that!?

But Mary patted her left hand on the tatami mat floor.

“Master Tenzou, you have treated me quite well, but I do have one complaint.”

“Wh-what is that!?”

Tenzou realized Masazumi and Naomasa were expressionlessly looking his way from the window beyond Mary. Naomasa moved her jaw to mouth “go on”, so what even was this situation?

But Mary could not see them and she answered his question.

“Let’s move to a bigger room soon.”

“J-judge! That’s right!”

He wholeheartedly agreed with that. After all, he was running out of room to hide the porn games that were piling up with no chance to play them. And they had gathered more possessions as they lived together. So...

“We can start by moving to a 10 square meter room and, um, you know, we can get that pot rack you’ve been-...”

“No, not that.”

Mary bluntly cut him off and suddenly straightened her wobbling head.

“I want to sleep with our futons side by side. No, if possible, in the same futon.”

Naomasa briefly froze in place, but Masazumi soon nodded to say “don’t let it bother you”. She then had Tsukinowa produce a sign frame from her shoulder: <It’s a necessary step for the history recreation.> ...*Our relationship is being regulated! This is the dark side of a regulated society!*

But Mary could not see the goings-on behind her.

“Master Tenzou, I want to be able to touch you while I sleep. I would be so happy if you were right next to me when I woke up in the morning and when I woke up in the middle of the night.”

“Well...”

“Thank you very much.”

...*I still don’t understand and did she just take that as a yes!?*

Mary, however, raised her eyebrows a little and her head nodded a bit. He could tell she was sleepy, but...

“Master Tenzou. Do you know how thankful I am for you?”

Tenzou’s words briefly caught in his throat.

He had a feeling “yes” was the wrong answer, but “no” also seemed like a bad answer.

As he tried to figure out what to say, Neshinbara held up a sign fame by the wall.

<Talk about love. A love that will last more than a hundred billion nights!> *It would seem people actually calm down when their anger reaches the limit.*

But Tenzou used the words that came to him naturally.

“I am thankful for you as well, Mary-dono.”

“I am more thankful for you.”

“No, I am.”

“No, I am more thankful.”

“Are you, Mary-dono?”

“I am, Tenzou-dono.”

Mary mimicked his way of speaking and let her shoulders droop.

“After all,” she said. “Ever since coming here, I have wanted for nothing and felt so much happier than in the past.”

Tenzou did not know what to say or think.

...Mary-dono...

He saw tears in her eyes.

She wiped the tears from her cheeks with a casual movement of her track suit sleeve.

So Tenzou opened his mouth.

“Mary-dono.”

“Wh-what is it?”

She was drunk, so would she remember this conversation? But he felt like this was something he could only say due to that uncertainty.

And he made sure to check on his surroundings.

...They're mostly asleep, aren't they!?

He felt like his future was forfeit simply because the awful merchant was awake and working, but he had no choice. He also saw Naomasa and Masazumi staring out the window while blatantly keeping an ear directed his way.

But he could not let their presence bother him.

This was about Mary. So he moved his knees up toward her.

“Listen.”

This is the reverse of earlier, he thought as he continued.

“I am no more than a ninja.”

That was true. He had no special ability provided by his species like a lot of the others and he was not skilled with spells.

“So I merely devote myself to the things I can do and live my life without asking for much,” he said. “But there is one luxury for which I was willing to turn my back on that lifestyle.”

“You mean...?”

“That is you, Mary-dono.”

Mary stopped moving. Then he raised his right index finger toward her.

“And now that one luxury in my life is saying she is happy with her life here. That is the greatest happiness for me and I take pride in it. I am glad I made the choices and decisions I did and I am glad I have you and everything about you.”

“Then...” More tears spilled from Mary’s eyes. “I need to make sure you make me even happier. And please tell me what I can do to make you happy. After all...”

After all...

“Your happiness is my happiness too.”

Naomasa could be heard choking on her kiseru smoke outside the window. After a while, Tenzou also heard Masazumi saying “That’s right, Naomasa. I know just how you feel.”

Regardless, Mary seemed to have calmed down. She was still drunk, but...

“Master Tenzou?”

“Judge, what is it?”

Mary patted her thigh.

What did that mean?

...? Am I supposed to focus on her thigh?

It was a truly splendid shape.

But then Mary once more patted her thigh as if prompting him to do something.

Eh? he thought with a tilt of the head. He saw her wrinkle her brow a little.

She was upset.

...Huh? Um, wh-why? What is all this?

Mary then slapped her thigh twice, but he still did not understand.

“U-um, Mary-dono?”

“...Master Tenzou.”

She seemed to be saying “you had better understand without me telling you”.
No...

*...Mary-dono would say “please understand without me needing to tell you”,
wouldn’t she!*

He corrected himself, but the situation remained unchanged.

“...Ah.”

Only after observing his surroundings did he understand what Mary meant.

To their left, the idiot and Horizon were using Asama as...

...A lap pillow.

I see! he realized, but he also shuddered.

At home would be one thing, but if he slept like that here, he could not even guess what the others would do if they woke up first. No, he could actually guess *exactly* what they would do and it scared him.

...I would easily fill the entire top 10 search terms on the Musashi divine network!

But Mary...

“Master Tenzou.”

Looking somewhat drunk, she raised her eyebrows a little, but she looked somehow uncertain of herself. In fact, she looked on the verge of tears.

...Mary-dono is mustering her courage, too.

When he heard her slap her thigh again, he spoke.

“Mary-dono. We are being watched.”

Masazumi saw Crossunite disappear.

...Oh?

The ninja vanished in an instant.

“Eh?”

Even while sitting right in front of him, Mary’s shoulders jumped in surprise when he vanished. Masazumi could guess this was a ninja technique, but why use it and where had he gone?

“...Ah.”

She suddenly found Crossunite lying with his head in Mary’s lap.

Mary also finally noticed.

“Oh, dear,” she said. “Master Tenzou? Your hat is touching my chest.”

However, she did not try to remove the hat. Crossunite simply pushed the hat down over his face.

And after checking on his surroundings...

“...This is a luxury.”

“Master Tenzou?”

“What is it?”

“Next time, can I use your arm as a pillow?”

Naomasa gathered smoke into her right cheek so fast the end of her kiseru glowed red.

She then blew the pale smoke out the window through the left side of her mouth.

“...Today has been bad for my heart.”

“Yeah, I know what you mean. ...Hey, look. Naruze is drawing out a storyboard in her sleep.”

Something was also happening with Aoi's group. Mitotsudaira had lost the battle against sleepiness and collapsed, so her upper body was draped over the idiot and Horizon like a cat.

And in her sleep, the Aoi Sister was opening the stomach of Asama's inner suit, so just how fully-automatic was that entertainer sister?

But, thought Masazumi as she and Naomasa looked back at them all.

"We'll be busy in an entirely different way starting tomorrow."

A few lights were on in the city that night.

The cross-sword information display at the end of the street said, "London – West Soho". The display's clock said it was 1 AM.

The road was illuminated by one light source in particular. The light came from a pub known as the Mermaid Tavern and the customers within were divided into two groups: those standing and those collapsed.

The standing group was represented by Elizabeth, who wore casual clothing and carried Ex. Caliburn, and Cecil, who wore her summer uniform. The collapsed group was represented by Jonson and Howard.

"Are you okay, Howard? Should we call your wife?"

"N-no. I-I can stand, I can stand!"

Howard grunted with effort and managed to get up on his knees.

But at that point...

"———"

He grew expressionless.

Then he collapsed forward as if the string supporting him had snapped. His forehead made a nice sound as it slammed into the wooden floor, so Elizabeth gave an impressed nod.

"Well done, Howard. So you can pull off a prostration even while drunk off your ass. How about you, Jonson?"

“Jonson hasn’t been moving at all for a while now.”

Cavendish had joined in the festivities using a personal virtual ocean spell, but she now lay on the floor while her mermaid tail occasionally flopped weakly against the floor.

Seeing all of them, Drake spoke to Hawkins next to him.

“We’re supposed to be celebrating Mary’s victory and Walter’s recovery after returning from Russia, so this is just pathetic. I’m personally fond of wine milk, though.”

“This was the obvious result of not pacing their drinking properly. And Sir Walter left with Sir Milton after the atmosphere of the celebration started to grow dangerous.”

“Walter’s danger sense is something else,” said O’Malley as she poked the collapsed group with her staff. “Although part of that is his weakness to alcohol.”

Ivy made of ether grew from the floor and gently wrapped around the collapsed people. The ivy was green at first, but it gradually grew red.

“Are you removing the alcohol?” asked Hawkins.

“No, their blood. I’m being selective, though.”

The mermaid started flopping around, but the ivy was stronger than the drunk.

O’Malley took a bite from a skewer of fried fish and asked the Fairy Queen a question.

“You’re in a good mood, Fairy Queen. Is the alcohol affecting you?”

“H-H-H-H-Her Majesty is drunk?”

“Calm down, Dudley. Calm down and eat some desalted chicken.”

Elizabeth made sure Cecil passed some to Dudley, before...

“This is because of that. Look.”

She casually grabbed Ex. Caliburn from her hip and pointed it southeast.

“...!”

Everyone in that direction got down on the floor. And that went beyond just the Trumps in the pub. The people on the street also did so once they noticed. As did those in the building across the street and the building beyond that.

“Wah...!!”

“What is with all of you? I might be drunk, but I still know what I’m doing.”

“Fairy Queen! Fairy Queen!” said Bacon. “How do you fire that!? Show me, show me!”

“If you insist, Bacon. You fire it like this.”

She ended up blowing off the pub’s door, tearing off the roof of the building across the street, and receiving a complaint from northern M.H.R.R. which was along the path of the blast.

“F-Fairy Queen! Tomoe Gozen sent a very disrespectful message calling you a moron and telling you to die!”

“But it *would* be dangerous if that hit someone.”

“Fairy Queen! Fairy Queen! How would it be dangerous!? Show me, show me!”

She ended up receiving a second complaint.

Walsingham caught and brought back the blasted door with her arms.

“...Drain?” she calmly asked.

“My sister must be drunk.” Elizabeth turned her flushed face toward the unseen southeastern sky. “We share some sensations. That would be due to sharing our souls. And I have been receiving more from my sister lately.”

“Y-you mean Double Bloody Mary’s power is growing?”

“She was always the one who held me in check. I can produce my wings of light for an instant, but my sister produced enough water lilies to reach the horizon, remember? ...That coincided with England’s ley lines and she was trying to protect this country. She has enough power to do so,” said Elizabeth. “But the more our feelings align, the more easily they are conveyed. I am living

a happy life, so when my sister becomes aware of her own happiness...”

She laughed a little.

“She must want to let someone know. ...I’m not sure if I’m really the person she most wants to know, however.”

“You seem happy, Fairy Queen.”

“This is nothing but an annoyance, Drake. Weird emotions reach me in the middle of meetings. And if they’re strong enough, physical sensations reach me as well. Or they used to. That stopped happening when-...”

“Don’t say it was when she killed the 300. I’m no good with that sort of thing.”

Drake cut Elizabeth off, so she nodded.

“Let’s just say my sister refused to pass any of her pain onto me. And I don’t mean that as an emotional story. It just means Double Bloody Mary looked down on the Fairy Queen. After all, the Testament says Elizabeth was cruel to Mary.”

“That aside,” someone cut in. It was Bacon who had been examining the merchant who had stopped moving in his prostration pose. The Great Seal of England fairy tilted his head. “Can you not send your feelings to her?”

“The thing about my sister is,” Elizabeth grabbed her glass from the counter, “she isn’t used to having things done for her even though she can’t help but want to do things for others.”

Chapter 35: Course Changer at the End of Experimentation

第三十五章

『試され先の回頭者』



厄介な問題とは
答えること自体が難しい
配点 (安全)

Troublesome questions

Are difficult to even respond to

Point Allocation (Safety)

“Asama-sama, I have a bit of a question.”

The Musashi had left Ariake, made a slow change of direction, and started toward Sanada. That was when Asama heard Horizon’s voice.

They were in the classroom. They had pushed themselves to finish the exams for 7 subjects in the morning, so most of them were collapsed on their desks or leaning back in their chairs.

Asama had moved to Kimi’s desk to discuss the next day’s exams with Mitotsudaira, but...

“What is it, Horizon? Is it about tomorrow’s exams?”

“Judge. I have determined that theology is your field of expertise.”

“Oh, pass your notes this way too,” said Naito while collapsed on her desk with Naruze. “We’ll have it back at Mach speed.”

“Yes, yes,” said Asama as she prepared to distribute the notes with a sign frame. She also glanced over at the boy sleeping in the seat next to Horizon’s. “What happened to Toori-kun?”

“He wrote his answers in a flash and then fell asleep.”

“Judge,” replied Neshinbara. “The Far East’s Chancellor and Student Council President has to be incompetent, so he actually can’t afford to get good grades on his exams. It’s considered best if he can just barely skirt above failing.”

“Is that so?”

“Yes.” Asama nodded. “So Neshinbara-kun and I lend him our notes so he can get the bare minimum number of points. ...Oh, I sent you the notes too, Horizon. Do your best tomorrow, okay?”

“Thank you very much.”

Horizon bowed and Asama said “no, no.” But...

“I am already in your debt after sleeping in your lap last night.”

“You aren’t supposed to mention that. And Mito was lying on top of you just like a cat-...well, just like a dog.”

“Wh-why did you feel the need to reword that!?”

“Heh heh,” laughed Kimi while she prepared to distribute her classical literature notes since that was her best subject. “And Asama, you panicked when you woke up to find you were crushing my foolish brother’s face with your boobs.”

“That was quite impressive,” commented Horizon.

“N-no, that was, um...”

Kimi lifted up her own left breast and narrowed her eyes.

“Does it have an imprint of my foolish brother’s face on it?” She then stood up, wiggled around, and mimicked Asama’s voice. “N-no, that precious part of my body has been molded in Toori-kun’s shape...!”

“Don’t be ridiculous! It’s long since gone away!”

Asama’s accidental confession caused everyone to freeze in place. Only Naito and Naruze kept speaking.

“Ga-chan, if it went away, that means it was there to begin with, doesn’t it?”

“Shh. She’ll grow cautious if we point it out. We need to stay quiet.”

What were they planning? Meanwhile, Suzu tilted her head.

“Molded?”

“Um,” said Adele as she prepared to explain, but Naomasa immediately slapped her on the back of the head to stop her.

...Nice one, Masa!

Masa takes things surprisingly seriously, thought Asama.

“Umm, it’s just, uh, a natural phenomenon.”

“Judge, that’s right,” replied Mary. “I let Master Tenzou sleep in my lap, but

when he woke up ahead of everyone else, my chest was pressed against his face – or rather, his hat – and it left a bit of a mark.”

Tenzou felt everyone looking at him.

...Oh, no!!

He had used a ninja technique to reduce the length of his sleep, so he had awoken before those other awful people. That had allowed him to sleep on Mary’s lap while also preserving his own safety. Or that was the plan, anyway.

He had not expected for Asama to hit him with some friendly fire. But it was too late now.

“Tenzou-kun, you slept in Mary’s lap?”

“A-Asama-dono! You did it first!”

“And you left a hat mark on a girl’s body? You’re the worst. Were you sleeping like this?”

“Naruze-dono! If that sketch is supposed to be me, my legs are longer than that!”

“Master Muneshige, Master Muneshige. Do you want to sleep in my lap, too?”

“Of course.”

Muneshige did not hesitate to answer.

“What about you, Kiyonari? No, you would probably prefer harder and more solid legs.”

“How do you know my tastes so perfectly...?”

That counts as weird, doesn’t it? thought Tenzou as Mary spoke to Asama.

“Judge. There is nothing odd about this.”

“Eh?”

Asama actually sounded confused for once. And Mary did not seem to care. She simply nodded and spoke with a narrow smile.

“I saw a nice color of ether. ...And that is guaranteed to have good results.”

That line caused Asama to blush and spread her mouth horizontally. Next to her, Horizon placed a hand on her shoulder and nodded twice. Asama seemed to understand what that meant.

“U-um...”

She grabbed Horizon’s shoulders and pulled her in as a shield against the others.

“We’re supposed to be discussing tomorrow’s exams, aren’t we!? Y-yes, I have notes for theology, so don’t you worry! If you’re worried, I can bring you a protective charm or an exorcism arrow! ...What are you laughing about, Kimi and Mito?”

“Silly girl.” Kimi patted Asama’s shoulder with a smile. “We’re going to the art room next. For the physical examination. ...You don’t want to increase your weight by eating first, do you?”

Kiyomasa sat at her desk.

A test paper lay before her eyes.

...We really are busy until summer break.

The night before, Katagiri had demanded that Musashi complete their schoolwork, but they had to do the same. They had been on the move to support and provide supplies for the groups in Mouri and elsewhere. Kiyomasa and Fukushima were especially falling behind after traveling from Edo to Mito for that “warning”.

...Fukushima-sama must be taking an exam right now too.

Everyone on the Azuchi Castle had apparently done more than them while in Edo. They were likely completing their exams while on their way here.

And the Azuchi Castle was moving slowly so as not to distract everyone onboard.

Fukushima would be using another ship to meet up with them early

tomorrow morning, but...

“When will that be...?”

“Katou-san, we are taking an exam.”

The teacher scolded her with a bitter smile.

“Sorry,” she replied and faced her exam once more.

Only then did she realize she had started looking out the window.

I’m getting distracted, she thought, but it was summertime outside. If not for the battles, the outside would have provided a liberating feeling. But at the moment...

...Each hour, we swap between exams and outside guard work.

Those whose schedules had let them finish their exams already formed the front line and everyone else formed a rotation between exams and war.

Not even Hashiba’s forces had perfect schedule management.

When fighting and otherwise interacting with other nations, there would be external interference. When securing the cooperation of the surrounding nations and opening invasion routes for the attack on Mouri, the progress toward summer break was used as a bargaining chip.

The other nations would not assist them if they did not receive safety or some other benefit in return.

Thus, their schedule was something of a mess.

Of course, negotiations with other nations had been built into the schedule, but Hashiba was managing it and would not make it public. When asked why, she had said...

“I-if I did, you would all grow dependent on it...”

...That was true enough.

If they had to appear on the battlefield, Kiyomasa wished they could train more first instead of appearing according to a schedule. And she wished they could use the margins of the schedule on themselves instead of other nations, but...

...If we did this right, we would be ready to fight at any time.

That said, exam time was always busy.

Heavily-equipped mobile shells were making midair dashes down the hallway, and in the classroom across the hall...

“S-sorry! I’m late for the health test! But today’s test is about combining techniques! I’m really interested in those, so I’m sure to get a good grade! Please let me take it!”

“Um, can’t I answer these questions via live demonstration!? ...No, wait! There’re only guys in this classroom!”

“Sensei! I don’t know the right terms, so can I draw a picture instead!”

Aren’t they being a little too honest?

Regardless, Kiyomasa had finished filling out her exam. She had also checked over it. So...

“Sensei, can I head outside?”

“Testament. Circle around to the back.”

“Testament,” she nodded before doing so.

She stood from her seat.

...We’re moving at low speed.

That was partially so the Azuchi Castle could catch up, but it was also due to the previous day’s events. They were traveling west through a forested region of southern Hexagone Française. Starting tomorrow, they would cross the base of the mountains and begin their invasion from central to northern Hexagone Française. From there, they would use the forest as a shortcut to approach the enemy capital of Paris more quickly.

But Musashi’s study camp would last 4 days and 3 nights, including the day of travel. At around the time the Hashiba forces were approaching Paris, Musashi would probably try to participate before summer break.

So they had to act fast.

...That means the flooding.

Certain conditions were needed to establish the attack on Mouri.

The most important and final condition was the flooding of Mouri's Bitchu Takamatsu Castle using engineering and irrigation.

But the corresponding location for Bitchu Takamatsu was not in southern Hexagone Française but in K.P.A. Italia.

So after some negotiation, they had decided to use an interpretation by flooding Paris as the Mouri stronghold instead.

They would submerge an entire city. They had made a lot of preparations for a larger-scale version of what had been done at Magdeburg.

Failure was not an option.

There were several ways of doing it and they had already performed a test at Magdeburg.

But since the flooding of Bitchu Takamatsu Castle was part of the history recreation, Mouri's intentions played a role. They could not come to an internal understanding of the issue like M.H.R.R. had done for Magdeburg.

"If Mouri tries to use that to negotiate..."

Kiyomasa walked to the door, opened it, and stepped out into the hall.

"Huh? Are you done already? That was fast."

A gold-winged figure took a step back with her eyebrows somewhat raised. She had been preparing to enter the classroom when Kiyomasa stepped out like a counterattack.

"Yoshiaki-sama. You're back early. Where is Angie-sama?"

Yoshiaki answered that by pointing her right hand upwards.

"Angie is on the 2-1 rotation. Ever since Novgorod," she pointed her thumb toward the empty space behind her, "My Weiss Fürstin has needed a bit of fine tuning. Angie's Schwarz Fürstin seems to be relatively stable, though."

"I suppose even complete gravitational control has its problems..."

“Everything about the Technohexen is a type of lost technique.” Yoshiaki smiled a little. “Is there anyone in there?”

“I was the only one for the health exam.”

“Oh? That’s unusual.”

“Huh?”

“The ones with more interest in it tend to put it off until last. Like Nagayasu. ... I was thinking of teasing Katagiri if he was in there, but fine. I’ll study for the next exam first.”

Yoshiaki opened the door with a dry rolling sound.

No one in the classroom turned around since they were taking exams, but they had to have sensed someone entering. A slight but unmistakable sense of people holding their breath filled the classroom.

But Yoshiaki ignored it and walked to an empty desk in the back.

Then Kiyomasa noticed something.

...She left the door open.

When she smiled bitterly and closed the door, Yoshiaki must have noticed because she smiled and waved.

And just as Kiyomasa shut the door...

“Alert! Enemy spotted 7km dead ahead!”

A divine transmission voice filled the hallway.

“It is an Hexagone Française *Lourd de Marionnette* anti-air unit!”

Someone stood on the bow of the ironclad ship at the head of the M.H.R.R. Hashiba Mouri invasion fleet.

The girl had 6 black wings and a long black cannon. She opened a magnification spell on a Magie Figur and drew an ether image with a focusing device shaped like a painting knife.

That image roughly represented the grassy field and the left and right forests

seen ahead.

“Oh, there they are. Kacky, are you picking this up?”

□□凸: “I am. This was definitely sudden. There was no advance warning at all.”

“If even you’re saying that, then maybe it was god of war stealth.”

□□凸: “I’m not so sure... Wait, Wakisaka-san! Here they come! 8 cannon blasts!”

Eight drawings of light approached in the Magie Figur that Angie held.

They accurately flew toward the bow of the ironclad ship.

“Wow.”

Angie tightly closed her wings to protect herself from the blast.

Several layers of defense barriers opened on the front of the ship and the 7 shells hit those from the front.

Sound exploded.

The defense barriers broke, they shattered along the cracks, and shards of light filled the air. Angie’s wings shook as the remnants hit them.

“Oh, Kacky!”

With that, she spun her right hand around.

The long black cannon flipped around from her palm to the back of her hand before falling into her grasp. The cannon was made from long metal panels without any joints and Angie held it below her arm.

“Take this!”

She returned fire.

One shell hit with a time delay.

All 8 had been fired simultaneously, but just one of them was a different sort of shell.

The different shell fell behind the other 7 after flying the approximately 7km. But it still reached its destination.

This final shell arrived after the previous 7 had shattered the defense barriers. That was the trick.

But Angie returned fire in that instant.

When she fired her 5m cannon, the broom contained within slid backwards.

“Let’s go with a silver coin!”

A bullet coin, which was shaped like a bullet, was swallowed by the muzzle and the cannon’s rear slide raced forward. It provided enough force to launch the coin forward and white light escaped the gaps in between the panels forming the cannon.

“Herrlich!”

The repulsion acceleration spell Magie Figur shattered and the bullet flew.

The shot was launched straight forward with a bit of an upward angle.

“How about that!?”

It hit.

Sound could not keep up with the high-speed impact. It simply glowed and produced sparks which brightly illuminated the bow.

After the hit from the bullet, the shell collapsed and split in two as if melted by the impact.

The shell had been about 60cm long.

It had been fired toward the bottom of the ship’s bow, but while the front was melted, twisted, and bisected, the back managed to stop the bullet’s impact from passing through it.

“...Not quite.”

Just as Angie said that, the twisted shell split in two.

“Sorry.”

And it hit the defense barriers that were quickly put in place.

The impact was a loud one.

The shell had lost its power, so the barriers were not broken. But there was a solid sound and some fragments did scatter through the sky.

Instead of watching it through to the end, the black-winged girl moved the cannon from below her arm to her hand. She then spun the mass of black steel in her hand like it weighed nothing.

“Should I head out? Should I shoot?”

□□凸: “Wakisaka-san. You weren’t given the order to charge.”

“Also,” continued Katagiri.

□□凸: “The enemy has disappeared.”

Angie looked far out ahead of the bow.

She saw smoke rising in the disturbed air where the enemy gods of war had been.

Their shellfire had produced that smoke. Or so it seemed at first glance.

But in actuality...

□□凸: “That is a smokescreen to help them escape. It’s a natural smoke not produced by a spell.”

AnG: “What do you think of them, Kacky?”

□□凸: “They were probably buying time. Or that’s what I told Takenaka-san when she asked me.”

...Then that isn’t it.

She felt bad rejecting Katagiri’s idea, but Angie was certain something was off about that interpretation. If they were trying to buy time, then they had given up far too easily.

Katagiri was honest in his interpretations, so *that* was probably accurate to what he thought. But it would be best if someone with a different view assumed it was *something else*.

So Angie opened a new Magie Figur and set up a divine chat with just Takenaka.

AnG: “Takeko, what do you think?”

Kuro-Take: “I’d say from the left.”

AnG: “Sure thing.”

Angie turned herself and her cannon to the left. And a moment later...

...Is that it!?

She set a bullet coin in the barrel and immediately fired into the forest to the left.

□□凸: “Eh? Wakisaka-san!?”

Yoshiaki placed a hand on her forehead while taking the home economics test.

...This is not good.

She had completely forgotten everything related to nutrition.

For the history recreation, nutritional science ranked every food based on whether it raised or lowered one’s body temperature and whether it was “aboveground” or “underground”. The actual nutritional information was used as an alternative interpretation.

It was all a gigantic pain. She wished it was all summed up with symbols like V-whatever like it had been in the Age of the Gods.

...Oh, there’s a question about that.

<Question: Why does nutritional science not use the knowledge from the Age of the Gods?> Was this a spot reserved for them to put all their stress down on the page?

“Hm,” breathed Yoshiaki before getting to writing:

“The rules of the history recreation are most important. And because knowledge of nutritional science can support the population of a powerful

nation, this political inconvenience can be used to restrict the more powerful nations. However...”

However...

“Because this conversion of terminology can be handled automatically using spells, it does not hinder anyone’s day-to-day life.”

That’s pretty stiff, she thought with a self-deprecating laugh.

“Oh?”

“Katou...Yoshiaki-san, keep your eyes on your exam.”

“Sensei, I think everyone should take cover.”

A moment later, the windows on the left all shattered and an explosive blast filled the classroom.

Kimee: “That was exciting, Angie.”

AnG: “Eh? That wasn’t me. I think you should blame Hexagone Française for that one.”

Angie flipped around a few times and opened her support wings while flying in the rough air.

She was nearly swept back through the sky as she came to a stop and she found she had moved about 15m starboard from the bow of the ironclad ship.

Down below, she saw students rushing up from the lower levels to locate the enemy from the deck.

The male student commander looked up her way.

“Spear #5! What is the situation!?”

“I don’t see any movement at the moment, so I think it’s fine.”

She checked around her as she said that. In the forest to port, a lot of trees had fallen and a space with a radius of 50m had been crushed.

...That was pretty powerful.

The ship had come to a stop. So had those behind it.

AnG: “Can the next ship swap places with us and continue on? We’ll stay here until we can make a decision.”

Kuro-Take: “That would be meaningless if the same thing happened to that one. Your ship is made to take a beating, so please keep going. As long as you can return fire, I don’t think you’ll be sunk.”

“Sure thing,” replied Angie while drawing a picture of the situation on the deck.

The maintenance division would decide whether the ship’s frame and armor had been bent.

And she had another question.

AnG: “What do you think their strategy is?”

Angie asked about the logic of the enemy’s actions and she received a response.

Unsurprisingly, it was from Takenaka, their tactician.

Kuro-Take: “Good question. That shell they used in the first attack was fairly troublesome.”

She may have been doing work at the same time because there was a short pause before she continued.

Kuro-Take: “That first attack used an extremely simple time delay, but using barriers to defend against every high-speed shell like that is the standard. The sound, light, and ether reading of shellfire are all used as a trigger, but there isn’t time to make a manual adjustment even if we notice a time delay that forms after they’re fired.”

Kimee: “That’s true.”

Yoshiaki joined the conversation.

She was supposedly taking an exam, but it had likely been called off for now.

She sent a whole bunch of words at once, perhaps due to the shift in mood from exam to battle.

Kimee: *“If they create a time delay by delaying the firing of one shell, we’ll detect that timing and the defense barriers will respond automatically. But if the time delay appears after firing, our response is delayed because we’re so used to using the actual firing to judge the timing...”*

Kuro-Take: *“That’s because the standard tactic is to fire all your shells at once to concentrate your firepower enough to destroy the defense barriers. And that’s why the defender will defend against them all at once.”*

□□凸: *“So just now...?”*

Kimee: *“Yes, we were used to test out a new time-delay shell. And that would make it a different kind of new shell from the one used against the transport ship yesterday.”*

“That’s right,” said Angie.

During the battle the day before, they had all seen a new kind of shell pierce the transport ship but send just its impact through without actually breaking out the other side.

...Oh, wait. We didn’t actually see it since we arrived later.

But Kiyomasa’s mobile shell had recorded the footage.

For Hexagone Française, that shell was likely the cornerstone of their anti-ship strategy.

It was that shell that prevented the Hashiba forces from traveling high in the sky.

Because they had to land, it was difficult to place weaponry on the bottom of an aerial ship.

So the standard tactic was to rely on defense barriers for attacks from below, but since that shell could weave between the defense barriers and hit them, they could not expose their defenseless hull as they moved.

So they were traveling at low altitude while using the terrain for cover.

Kuro-Take: *“But that impact shell...oh, that’s what I’m calling it, by the way. Anyway, it has done a wonderful job of ruling this battlefield. And it somewhat changes the meaning of that time-delay shell.”*

Angie understood what Takenaka meant.

The enemy could eliminate the defense barriers with the time-delay shell and then send in the impact shell.

But...

□□凸: "I think there are a few ways to defend against the time-delay shell. But if we're limiting it to ones the M.H.R.R. Hashiba forces can definitely pull off...wouldn't our best bet be creating a double layer of defense barriers?"

Kimee: "I hate to say this after your dramatic pause with the ellipsis there, but who said there was only one layer of time delay?"

□□凸: "Ah."

Kuro-Take: "No, they need quite a few shells to break through the defense barriers. If we can confirm the enemy's number of shells, I think we could figure out how many layers they could form."

Angie descended to the bow while seeing Katagiri thank Takenaka for supporting his idea.

She looked out front and saw the distant smokescreen thinning out.

On the grassy field, she caught glimpses of deer and other animals that had fled from the forest.

It was a peaceful enough scene, but it was ruined by the harsh smell of the smokescreen.

The enemy had already vanished from beyond the smoke and no further shell arrived from the forest to port.

In that case...

AnG: "We probably should double up on the defense barriers. How are we doing on fuel?"

Kimee: "We have that useful puppet, remember? ...But won't producing double defense barriers put a huge burden on the barrier creation devices? Can we not send physical parts through the ley lines? Y'know, like our phase space. ...Oh, they're restarting the exam, sorry."

Yoshiaki's name vanished and someone else spoke instead.

Kiyo-Massive: "Um, can I add to that?"

AnG: "Go right ahead."

Kiyo-Massive: "Testament. It is possible to transport physical objects via ley line divine transmissions, but it uses up a lot of power to maintain the object's form. ...Yoshiaki-sama and Wakisaka-sama's phase spaces only need the one entrance, so they're left alone after you put the object inside and close it. But when you need multiple entrances, the environment and settings vary a lot, so changes are liable to happen and it's harder for the objects to maintain their form."

AnG: "Oh, yeah. It's true that Kime-chan and my phase spaces just kind of follow us around... They look like a coffin when we summon them with a spell, but are they always closed when on the other side?"

Kiyo-Massive: "Shall I send a request to Hashiba-sama for some physical supplies?"

□□凸: "If we don't and we have to receive spare parts through normal transportation, I would want to keep a long supply line behind us to secure a safe route..."

Kuro-Take: "That would delay the invasion."

"But anyway," said Takenaka.

Kuro-Take: "It is necessary and they seem to want that. I think this will become a bigger deal later on, but let's do this the way they want. ...I will discuss this with Hashiba-kun. In order to put everyone's worries at ease, let's stay here for a while and resupply. We can resume the invasion afterwards. I am certain we will see something interesting once we arrive at Paris."

"Eh?" said Angie while descending to the deck.

...Is there something at Paris?

The only thing she knew they would find there was a clash with the enemy's main forces.

Paris was being treated as Bitchu Takamatsu Castle which Hashiba had to

flood.

...This is a real pain...

But was there anything else at Paris?

She had no idea.

But thinking about that was a job for Takenaka and the others. Angie's job was to stand in the vanguard and fight.

"In that case," she said. "Are we supposed to keep going while assuming we'll occasionally come under attack?"

Kuro-Take: "That is correct. I'm getting a better and better picture of what Hexagone Française is doing. ...I think they are both our enemy and our ally. After all..."

Takenaka paused for a moment before continuing.

Kuro-Take: "They know how to use both pride and vainglory."

Chapter 36: Acceptor in a Hiding Place

第三十六章

『隠れ場所の受け入れ人』



それは自分であり
それは自分でなく
配点（共有）

That is me

That is not me

Point Allocation (Sharing)

We did a physical examination in spring too, didn't we? thought Suzu inside the art room with the curtains closed.

Spring was already 3 months ago and Horizon had not been part of Class Plum back then, but...

...Everyone would go to the Blue Thunder.

Suzu had not known whether or not Horizon had been the real one or not, but she had avoided going to the Blue Thunder because she might “figure out” the answer from her movements and general presence.

She had not known what she would say to the others or how it would affect Horizon's interactions with the others if she did happen to confirm to herself that it was or was not Horizon.

So Suzu had been happy when he had brought her back.

And she had lightly scolded herself for being a coward.

“Um...”

“Shh, Suzu-sama, please do not speak. It will prevent me from accurately measuring your boobs.”

Horizon held a cloth measuring tape around her from behind. And...

“Nh...!”

She measured. But then she changed the angle of the measuring tape.

“Is this the right spot...?”

“Eh? F-for what?”

“Oh, I was only trying to decide the best angle and position for measuring your bust if I think of it as divided horizontally between the under-bust and over-bust”

“Oh,” said Naomasa. “You mean measuring them from the top or bottom?”

“Judge. After all, Suzu-sama does have some volume even if it is not very noticeable when she wears her uniform. With Kimi-sama or Asama-sama, this would clearly be the best position for the maximum boobs diameter, but with a flatter volume such as Suzu-sama’s – especially when she is still growing – I began foolishly wondering if there was an internal over-bust or a future growth over-bust I should use instead of the obvious one.”

“N-no, um...”

“So in your opinion, those boobs still have hope in their future, Horizon?”

“Heh heh heh. Horizon? What about Adele?”

Horizon turned toward Adele.

Asama and Heidi tried to encourage Adele by saying “C’mon! Give it your best shot!” However...

...What is she supposed to be giving her best shot here?

But Horizon...

“Kh...”

After a while, she calmly nodded.

“An automaton cannot lie. But I also wish to avoid saying anything cruel, so this is quite the conundrum. Any suggestions?”

“That’s cruel enough as it is!!” shouted Adele, but Suzu felt like she should not sympathize with her. So she said something else instead.

“Let it bother you...and you lose.”

“But if I don’t let it bother me, I’m pretty sure I’ll lose any hope of a future.”

“Now, now,” said Asama as she patted Adele’s shoulder. At the same time, Mitotsudaira measured Asama’s chest.

“...Eh?”

Mitotsudaira’s voice caused everyone else to stop moving.

Naruze instantly raised her right hand.

“Don’t say it. Someone might hear you. Instead, send me a divine mail later.”

“Wh-why would you need that information!? For a doujinshi again!?”

But then they heard quiet laughter. It came from Mary who was letting Kimi measure her by the curtain-covered window. She faced the others to speak.

“Was it this lively during the spring too?”

“Heh heh. You, Horizon, Futayo, Gin, and Narumi weren’t with us during the spring.” There was a smile in Kimi’s voice. “Then again, it was plenty lively then too. And during the Battle of Mikawa, after we completed our writing class, the Testament Union ordered us to redo the physical examination so we wouldn’t be able to do anything.”

“That’s right, isn’t it?” said Naito. “They were basically trying to confiscate our weaponry, weren’t they?”

“Right, right,” replied Naruze with a nod. “We had our skirmish with the guard unit there, but we kept the initiative. ...That’s what led to Neshinbara and Shirojiro getting their meeting in the library.”

“I see.” Futayo nodded while playing rock-paper-scissors with Masazumi to see which would measure the other first. “I was exhausted and fell asleep at the time, so I didn’t catch a lot of that.”

“...Yeah, and I was also asleep while you did that,” said Masazumi.

“I had a meeting in the engine division,” said Naomasa. “Were you asleep too, Mito?”

“I had a meeting with the knight league.”

Mitotsudaira’s words sounded a little weak, but that was probably because she had grown more distant from the knight league since then.

The Battle of Mikawa had caused a lot of change. And the current events probably would too.

“The physical examination we’re doing now is to make up for the one we couldn’t complete at Mikawa,” said Kimi. “But that might be for the best. I mean, we have Horizon, Futayo, Mary, Gin, and Narumi with us now.”

“If you ask me, that does not seem like a good excuse for peeping.”

Tenzou spoke to Toori while they crouched low and moved along the wall of the rear building.

It was past evening. The Musashi was traveling west and the sunlight shined on it from the west, but the rear building was in the shadow of the front building.

Ninja techniques worked better in the shadows. They could erase your footsteps, erase your presence, and even make you invisible. The idiot behind Tenzou must have known that.

“Oh, c’mon. We couldn’t do this the first or second time during the spring. Don’t you want to see Mary naked?”

“Well, I do, but...hmm.”

“What’s that groan for?”

“Toori-dono, you mustn’t look at Mary-dono naked.”

Me: “Hey, this guy’s getting all possessive...”

Novice: “I doubt you’ll have time to see much of anything. I mean, the art room currently has a good chunk of Musashi’s military power gathered inside it. ...But what about you, Urquiaga-kun and Peerless in the West? Do you not have a problem with them peeping?”

Uqui: “They aren’t after Narumi. I’d stop them if they were, though. And I’ve already seen it.”

Tachibana Husband: “Ha ha. Gin never leaves any openings, so there’s nothing to worry about. If anything, she would probably hesitate and leave an opening if I did go peep with you.”

Those almost sound like normal opinions, but they’re just as crazy as the rest of us.

I hope this doesn’t end badly, thought Tenzou as they arrived in front of the art room. They would have to crouch down lower than the window frame from

here on, but...

“Tenzou, what do we need to watch out for?”

“Judge.” Tenzou nodded. “Suzu-dono is our greatest enemy. It’s possible she has already noticed us.”

“That’s a good point,” muttered the idiot just as Tenzou noticed something.

...Is that...?

Sanada Nobuyuki questioned his own actions.

The ship carrying his father had gone ahead to Sanada while he remained in Musashi’s diplomatic building.

He was officially moving from Musashi to Mito via Sanada, so his presence there was not a secret.

He had nothing to do but wait for time to pass.

What was he supposed to do on the Musashi?

He could not perform diplomacy without preparing first. And the only diplomacy he was prepared for was a personal matter.

...Yes, and that got lost in the confusion last night.

His marriage.

He was fairly certain Musashi Vice Chancellor Honda Futayo had rejected him, but what if the exact situation had been the problem? What would happen if he stated his wishes while they were facing each other as individuals?

But when he arrived at the academy, a sign frame popped up to inform him they were performing a physical examination. Honda Futayo was apparently being measured in the art room.

If he looked in through the curtains, he might be able to see her changing or being measured.

Oh, how wonderful a sight that would be.

But did this count as peeping?

No, this was a continuation of his confession from the night before. He was here to confirm how she felt. That was the whole of his motivation here, so he had no impure thoughts.

And if he had no impure thoughts, it was not peeping. Yes, he must avoid thinking about how cute their bangs girl was. He was only here to take his wife in accordance with the history recreation, so he would only take a quick peep... no, remind her of his intentions.

“Okay.”

Nobuyuki made full use of his invisibility ninja technique as he continued on.

Suzu sat in her chair and observed everyone’s movements.

She had noticed someone approaching when they were about 30m away. She had removed Noise Neighbor for the physical examination, but this may have been her first time sensing someone at that distance without it.

...Someone’s right up next to the wall.

Once she noticed that, she immediately realized who it would be.

So she hesitated at first.

She thought maybe it was okay to keep quiet about it. After all...

“Toori-kun wants to see...doesn’t he?”

Who did he want to see? She thought it had to be Horizon. But he also occasionally went to peep at the Asama Shrine’s spring or wherever the class’s girls were changing.

She thought back over the historical victims.

...Asama-san, Mitotsudaira-san, Kimi-chan, Masa-san, and...

She had to add “me” to the list.

So she decided to share the problem and informed the others that he was here to peep.

“He leaves us no choice.”

Asama sounded exasperated as she prepared a restraint spell and pulled out her bow, Mitotsudaira smiled a little and pulled out her silver chains, Adele smiled and pulled out her spear, Naomasa pulled out Jizuri Suzaku's giant wrench, Heidi prepared a form to sue him for damages, Futayo held up Tonbo Spare, Gin pulled Arcabuz Cruz from her dual pitch space, Narumi drew a mandible sword from empty air, Naito and Naruze prepared their broom and pen, and Horizon...

"Wait, everyone."

She had placed Lype Katathlipse, Aspida Phylargia, and Maska Orge onto the art room's work desk and a dull sweat poured down her face.

"I do not have enough arms to use them all..."

"Oh, you're right. Vicereine Horizon's quick attack requires both hands, doesn't it?"

"Horizon? At times like this, go with your gut and choose one."

Was that how it worked? But...

"Mary-san, you aren't going to...fight back?"

"Judge. I am still not used to the etiquette in these matters, so I will simply observe the rest of you this time."

What does that mean? wondered Suzu, but maybe that was the normal way of things.

However, Narumi tilted her head.

"It doesn't really harm us, but what's so fun about peeping? ...If they actually bothered to build a relationship, they could see something else entirely."

"Ohhh..." said the others and Gin nodded.

"Date Vice Chancellor, I apologize, but in Tres España, it is 'passion' that leads a man to seek a woman. Of course, that is only the way of things in a southern nation."

"Judge. It's true that a northern woman prefers to warm up her man when he returns from the cold outside."

“Warrior women are the same, Date Vice Chancellor. ...Master Muneshige does not mind either way as far as that is concerned, but since he does not make many spontaneous adlibs, I would like a plan for what to do when it does happen.”

Flat Vassal: “That’s deep...”

Gold Mar: “Sometimes I feel like we mistake weird for deep.”

Mal-Ga: “This kind of thing is hard to draw...”

But Kimi had her own opinion on his peeping.

“What matters is that he feels like he saw something worthwhile. That might be something sexual, but I think the main point is to feel like he’s shared some kind of secret with us.”

“Kimi...that isn’t something you should force onto someone.”

“Oh? But wouldn’t it be weird to ask permission for that kind of thing? And so...”

Asama only wore a shirt over her breasts and Kimi stuck her hand between them from below.

“Look, look.” Kimi jiggled Asama’s breasts back and forth. “You make a fuss about it, but...it’s best to show off something that you want to keep a secret but are confident enough to let him see because you know he’ll like it. So let’s keep it at just a glimpse.”

Mary grabbed the chest of her track suit, lifted it up, and looked inside. Then she blushed and smiled at the others.

“I will keep that in mind.”

Asama: “I wonder if Tenzou-kun’s happiness gauge will spin too far and make him impotent.”

Silver Wolf: “Tomo! Tomo! You’re actually pretty angry, aren’t you!?”

Suzu did not entirely understand, but that was apparently how this worked. But then Asama looked in the direction of the curtain-covered window.

“Huh...?”

Futayo saw Asama suddenly lower her bow.

“Tomo...?” asked Mitotsudaira.

But then...

“Huh?”

She too frowned and lowered her silver chains.

But Futayo did not know why they had lowered their weapons.

...Huh?

What does this mean? Aren't we all preparing for a simultaneous counterattack? Were we only practicing our combat poses and we aren't actually going to attack?

...If so, that is very disappointing.

“Masazumi, I thought perverts were to receive the death penalty.”

“I do sometimes think that would be nice and that seems to be Ookubo's policy, but we can't properly govern Musashi if we don't delay any modifications to the law until a year after the fact.”

“I see. In that case, I must protect you, Masazumi.”

“Ga-chan! You're bleeding! You're bleeding from the nose!”

“Naruze-dono. To be blunt, are you sick?”

“Oh, yes... You could say I have a sickness...”

But Asama and Mitotsudaira were not the only ones who ended their attack preparations. Futayo's princess, Horizon, also did. She stopped doing “eeny meeny, miny, moe” with the Logismo Oplo, and...

“Suzu-sama.”

“Y-yes?”

Futayo did not understand their actions or words. But...

“Kimi-dono?”

She asked Kimi, who placed the back of her hand on her mouth and smiled bitterly.

“Oh, you foolish brother.”

The dancer placed her hands on her cheeks and began wiggling around with a smile.

“He really is thinking about us, isn’t he?”

As soon as she said that, there was a loud crash outside the window.

It was the sound of flesh being struck. Mitotsudaira looked across the others to make sure they were all dressed, and then...

“Criminal...!”

She used her silver chains to open the curtains for the window that had been struck. And there they found...

...Not the idiot!?

It was not. Adele shouted the identity of the person who had slammed into the window in a silly pose.

“The Sanada Chancellor!”

Everyone wordlessly raised their weapons once more.

“Um, I don’t know why he’s here, but keep in mind that he is a guest, okay?”

After thinking about what Masazumi said, they all held back a bit when they blew him away with their attacks.

Tenzou saw just how many times a human could be juggled in midair by a series of attacks.

The first hit had come from Gin’s Arcabuz Cruz.

A shell with the tip flattened for mail delivery hit Nobuyuki in the top of the chest, so his body bent backwards. Then two silver chains slammed into his sides and lifted his arms above his head.

Immediately afterwards, two mandible swords with flattened tips flew

forward, grabbed him from the sides, and lifted his entire body into the air. Then Naomasa's wrench hit him to send him even higher.

Nobuyuki flew for a bit after that, but he did react.

He was Sanada's Chancellor. He moved in midair, likely trying to escape with some kind of ninja technique. His body swelled out as if to show off his physical strength.

...Ohh!

He was a Sanada ninja. He probably could not use any special ninja techniques, but neither could Tenzou. Tenzou watched to see how a top-level normal ninja from another nation would attempt his escape.

"The Muneshige Bow scores its first hit...!"

Horizon fired Maska Orge just as Nobuyuki attempted to move and his limbs stretched out in midair as if all his muscles had tensed.

Toori spoke from next to Tenzou.

"Don't you really feel that one in your heart?"

The man who had been hit bent backwards in midair and then went limp. But...

"This should reach him," said Futayo.

The extension device sent the bottom of her spear right into his jaw, sending Nobuyuki flying again. As if to kick him while he was down (or shoot him while he was up), guided coin bullets struck his limbs and direct coin bullets hit his torso.

"Oh, let's go for the cliché."

"Good idea, Margot."

As Nobuyuki tilted backwards, a gathering of 7 coins stopped his rotation by hitting him in the crotch.

A moment later, his body crashed through one of the front building's hallway windows and he slammed into the library's external wall.

It made a nice sound. But...

“Oh, s-sorry. I was too slow!”

A spear flew out through the hole in the wall, but...

...Adele-dono, the tip didn't look flat on that.

Finally, Asama fired a restraint spell which filled the front building's hallway with light.

“...So it's over.”

I have a feeling dying would have been easier on him, thought Tenzou, but then the nudist moved next to him.

He scratched his head and peered into the art room window that had become a cannon producing a variety of attacks.

“Hey, how's it going, everyone?”

Horizon sighed while still holding Maska Orge.

She stood in front of the idiot with Asama and Mitotsudaira on her left and right.

“Are you here to peep?”

“Yeah, more or less,” he admitted. “But there was already someone here trying to peep.”

Horizon tilted her head at that.

“Couldn't you have chosen to peep with him? Then you could have avoided being found out before doing anything.”

“Well, I don't really get it myself, but I always end up doing this out in the open, y'know?”

“I am not sure that is something to be proud of.”

Asama, Kimi, and the others nodded in agreement there. And Masazumi...

“Oh, yeah. During swimming class last year, you walked right into our locker room while saying ‘oops, wrong room!’... Did you really think that lie would work?”

“Don’t be silly. What matters is that you have an excuse! ...Oh, what’s that look of contempt for, centipede girl!?”

“That’s right, Narumi-sama. Having an excuse is indeed what matters. Even if it is a lie, you can still fall for it if you wish to be deceived or let them deceive you.”

“And Tenzou’s here too, so you have a talk with him later, Mary,” said the idiot. “But...”

“But?” asked Horizon.

She tilted her head, so the idiot crossed his arms and tilted his head too.

“At the very least, I figured you wouldn’t want a stranger to see you...or I guess that was my reasoning?”

Mitotsudaira felt a brief flash of surprise.

It was not quite a fully-formed question. It was more of an uncontrollable emotion felt in response to something unexpected.

...U-um...? Oh!?

How was she supposed to respond? But Kimi walked up from behind, shook her hair around, and wrapped her arms around Mitotsudaira, Horizon, and Asama.

“Heh heh. Foolish brother? Do you want to see?”

“Oh, yeah, yeah.”

...You don’t have to be so honest about it!

“But,” said Kimi. “Do you not want anyone else to see?”

“Yeah...” The nudist scratched his head. “For example...”

“Y-yes?”

Mitotsudaira and Asama urged him onward in unison. Her king then peered in through the window and faced Mary.

“I feel like I shouldn’t really look at Mary. Or that centipede girl. I mean,

Tenzou and Uqui should be looking at them, right? Same for the Tachibana Wife. That's how I see it."

...*W-wait.*

Using that logic, what did it mean that he wanted to see them?

"Toori-sama, are you implying you want to make Asama-sama, Mitotsudaira-sama, Kimi-sama, Suzu-sama, and Adele-sama your wives?"

...*That's way too blunt, Horizon!!*

But the idiot simply groaned in thought.

He only thought for a terribly short amount of time, but in just those few moments, sweat poured from Mitotsudaira and her body felt damp.

The same was likely true of Asama on the other side of Horizon.

Then her king finally spoke.

"Whether or not I can make someone my wife comes down to my own ability and to your decision, doesn't it? I mean, you're the one by my side."

"Judge, that is true. But that will become a problem later on."

Horizon nodded.

Mitotsudaira did not know what that nod or the "problem" she mentioned meant.

Horizon then looked to the others.

"Listen, everyone. ...Toori-sama is working to save me and to retrieve my emotions while conquering the world. But..."

But...

"Unfortunately, Toori-sama cannot do *that* alone. And I cannot do it myself, so I can only rely on Toori-sama. And that leads to something..."

What did that lead to?

Horizon explained.

"I have determined that Toori-sama and I have remade your lives and lifestyles into our own."

Masazumi remembered two things when she heard Horizon's words: The Battle of Mikatagahara and the Battle of Novgorod.

...Back then...

Yoshiyori had saved them all, including the idiot, and he had entrusted them with the rest.

And at Novgorod, Horizon had said something when she fired the Muneshige Bow.

"When is the right time for us to live and to die...?"

"Judge, that is right," said Horizon. "This is a battle formation."

Horizon clearly stated that while looking to the idiot and placing her hand on Kimi's which was wrapped around her.

"I cannot do anything, so I hope that you will all support me and take us where we wish to go. That will truly fulfill my desire. ...But at the same time, that means Toori-sama and I will be forcing our own desires on all of you and taking away what you could have done otherwise. You might say you do not mind since the path we wish to walk down is the same as yours, but..." She looked across them all. "If not for us, you would have lived different lives and died different deaths. That might have been something wholly your own with no connection to Toori-sama or me. So..."

When she said that, the nudist spoke up while looking in from outside.

"You're coming with us because you want to. We understand that. But, Horizon, you have another thought too, don't you?"

"You know what will happen if you are wrong, I assume?"

"Yeah," said the idiot. So Masazumi gasped.

...This is...

Important.

What he said next would most likely bring them to the next stage.

They had been entrusted with everything during their loss at Mikatagahara

and they had seen life and death at the new beginning of Novgorod, but now...

“...Will we begin to live?”

“Don’t tense up like that, Seijun.”

Then the idiot spoke to everyone there.

“We will make our dreams come true. And from beginning to end, I’ll take responsibility and look after you all.”

Horizon listened to the idiot’s words.

“I’ll become a king and create a kingdom that can make all your dreams come true. All of you will help out when you feel like it. Although you’ll basically be saying, ‘now we’re even’. But the fact remains that Horizon and I are kind of dragging you all along on this. That’s true for Nate and for Asama too. It’s especially true for sis.”

The nudist grabbed the ninja and pulled him up from below the window.

“We’ve even got Tenzou stuck supporting all of England. But, Tenzou, you’re a more dependable guy than me.”

“Wh-what makes you say that?”

It was not the nudist who answered the ninja’s question.

It was Mary. The English princess placed her hands on her cheeks first.

“You took full responsibility when it came to me.”

“Th-that was because...”

The ninja mumbled a bit, but after a while, he breathed in.

“It was necessary if I was to stay with you, Mary-dono.”

“...Of course.”

Mary nodded and tears spilled from the corners of her eyes.

Everyone immediately turned toward the ninja.

“You made her cry!”

“Th-that was a little different, wasn’t it!?”

“You can come in, so talk with her in here,” said the idiot.

Horizon looked to the others and they all nodded, so the ninja started to climb in through the window. However, the idiot kicked him, sent him rolling, and Mary had to help him up. That all counted as a single turn.

After that, the tearfully smiling girl and the ninja began speaking in a corner of the art room.

“Toori-sama.”

“Yeah,” he said with a nod. Seeing that, Horizon continued.

“Toori-sama and I will take responsibility for influencing your lives so much. In other words...”

In other words...

“You are welcome to join us.”

Chapter 37: Offerer of a Dreaming Place

第三十七章

『夢見処の差し伸べ者』



邪魔するのは心
賛同するのは心
逡巡するのも心
配点（熟成）

It is my heart that gets in the way

It is my heart that gives approval.

It is also my heart that hesitates

Point Allocation (Maturing)

They were welcome to join them.

Mitotsudaira was dumbfounded as Horizon said that with a thumbs up.

...U-um, does she mean like...a harem...?

Mitotsudaira thought and hesitated, but refused to let her understanding move in a more convenient direction. Her mother would have been different.

“Eh? Wh-what is it, honey? Oh, dear. You want me to stop? Yes, I understand. Then I will squeeze you even tighter, okay? ...Oh? You want me to stop that too? Well, if you insist. Then I will stop that...and move verrrrrry slowly, okay? Oh, dear. Why are you arching your back like that? I was only doing something different because you told me to stop.”

If only I had my mother's personality, thought Mitotsudaira before opening her mouth.

There was something she had to say, so she faced Horizon.

“Horizon? Isn't it too soon to make that decision? I mean, you still haven't retrieved all of your emotions. And even envy hasn't clearly shown itself yet, right?”

“Judge. That is true.”

“R-right? So you might later wish you hadn't made this promise.”

...Ahhh...

Mitotsudaira groaned in her heart.

She pictured a sandbag shaped like herself and punched it in her mind.

...Wh-why can I never say what I really think!?

And as she focused on that frustration over how incredibly typical of her this was, Horizon spoke.

“Kimi-sama has given me an idea concerning that.”

“A-and what is that?”

Did that question betray too much expectation?

But the next thing she knew, Asama was feigning disinterest beyond Horizon while clearly listening in.

...Y-you're trying to force this all onto me, aren't you!?

Mitotsudaira considered roaring once to surprise the shrine maiden, but they had shared this in the bath the day before.

So Mitotsudaira gave in and listened to Horizon.

“It is simple,” said Horizon. “Toori-sama and I will not be the leaders. ... Everyone will share the two of us. That way I will not feel envy.”

“Heh heh. Horizon? ...What about when you're ‘combining’?”

“I wish to continue the sharing there. Oh, and the boys are welcome to the crossdresser in that case.”

“Kimiiii!?! What have you been teaching her!?!?”

Kimi laughed as an obvious way of giving herself time to think.

A few beats later, she placed a hand on Horizon's shoulder.

“I'm impressed you so perfectly understood what I was saying. Well done, Horizon!”

“Y-you clearly just made that up on the spot! You did, didn't you!?!?”

Mitotsudaira wished she could do something about how Horizon gave Kimi a thumbs up, but another part of her wanted to be knocked over in that direction. And the reason why was obvious: *...Ah. It's like I'm wagging my tail and unsure how my master will react!*

As a wolf, that caused her to shudder. And then...

“W-wait just a second!”

That frantic demand to stop came from Asama.

...Wh-what is going on here!?

Asama’s thoughts were shaken after the situation took so many sudden turns.

More than just blushing, she felt like she had a fever from overworking her mind. And as she thought over it all from beginning to end...

...Eh? Ehhhhh!?

“Wh-what does that mean?”

That was not much of a question, but she did receive an explanation.

“Toori-sama, you are the cause of this, so you demonstrate.”

“Okay then...”

His gaze raced across the art room. Everyone frantically stepped back, except...

...Some of them are clearly showing he can come to them.

Kimi was as bold as ever, but Suzu was working hard not to flee back with the others. The Technohexen were erecting a manuscript Magie Figur barrier and Naomasa’s lack of motivation was downright impressive. However...

“Umm, Nate.”

“Y-yesh!?”

“C’mon, calm down, Nate. Stay, stay. ...Don’t pick up that chair!” The idiot scratched his head. “Listen. The way I see it, Nate, you’re already in a position where we share responsibility. I mean, you said you wouldn’t serve another king, right?”

“Y-yes, I did.”

“And I can relax when you’re around. It’s a nice feeling.”

...Nice? What does that mean!?

Asama wanted to ask, but that was Mitotsudaira's problem. Beyond Horizon, Mitotsudaira herself had her eyebrows somewhat raised, but her mouth was moving oddly and ended up clamped shut.

Was she happy or troubled?

However, he had more to say.

"But if we do things like that, it means you'll have the same dream as me. And I feel like that means I need to take responsibility for your dream."

"B-but granting her king's dream is a knight's greatest desire."

Asama cleared her throat when she heard Mitotsudaira's answer.

...Mito.

The problem here was his and Horizon's promise to help them, so she had this completely backwards.

But Asama understood how that had happened.

Mitotsudaira gave her a look, so she likely understood what Asama had meant. But she raised her eyebrows again, and...

"My king, you need not feel any responsibility there."

"Even if something does happen," said Mitotsudaira, "a knight only needs to receive some land as a reward from her king."

She was not confident that was what she actually thought. However...

"According to the Testament, that is the appropriate course of action."

That was exactly right.

...Yes, this is the normal decision.

She saw Horizon raise her right hand.

"I own no land."

"...Eh?"

"Yeah..." said the idiot as the ends of his eyebrows lowered. "Asking for that is

the worst thing you could've done, Nate."

"The worst thing...?"

"Judge. My father got a little carried away and triggered that big boom that destroyed Mikawa. And we also lost Edo thanks to Hashiba-sama's harassment. ...We do not have enough land to go around, so the officers will in fact have to be economical in that regard as an example to the others."

"B-but once we conquer the world, you'll have plenty of land..."

"We can't just steal it," said the idiot. "Even if it's a provisional rule, there're still people living there."

Masazumi raised her right hand at that.

"We could always develop the outer world and have the provisionally ruled nations leave the Far East."

"R-right!?" said Mitotsudaira.

"But, Mitotsudaira, it would be impossible to have them all move right away. And we must also allow the Far Eastern citizens to leave their reservations and live in their original land."

"Th-then..."

Why am I doubling down on this!? she screamed in her heart.

"Couldn't you place me as the ruling daimyo somewhere after you remove the provisional rule?"

Someone nodded at that suggestion: Horizon.

"I see," she said. "I have determined we could indeed reward someone with land by making them ruler of an empty territory."

"R-right?"

"Umm..."

Mitotsudaira saw Adele raise her hand.

She hesitantly looked at everyone and then at Mitotsudaira.

"Um, 5th Special Duty Officer?"

“Eh? What is it?”

“Oh, yes. ...Don’t you already have land as the Mito Ruler? And since it came from Hexagone Française, isn’t it the accurate size for the history recreation? So,” she said. “Even if it’s meant as a reward, does the history recreation even allow you to gain more land?”

...Oh, that’s right!!

Horizon wrinkled her brow and placed a hand on her chin.

“Yes, someone who already has an official inherited name and the land to match wouldn’t be able to receive any more...”

“Isn’t Nate the only person that applies to?”

“Toori-sama, I think we need a special rule saying we reward her with our own private land in such a case.”

“N-no, um...”

“Now, now.” Horizon stopped her with a hand. “If we are going to allot you a portion of the land we own...I would think 90% of Toori-sama’s room would not be enough for you.”

“Do I not get anywhere to sleep?” complained the idiot.

“Heh heh. You could always sleep in my bed like you used to,” suggested Kimi.

“You can’t do that...!”

Mitotsudaira shouted without thinking and then she heard Naruze speak next to her.

“Then you’ll have to be his bed.”

Mitotsudaira tried to say something.

“———”

But Asama saw her hang her head and tense up so much she nearly fell to her knees.

...That was an impressive failure...

Asama kind of understood and Horizon now turned toward her.

“How about you, Asama-sama?”

Horizon said it like she was offering a drink, so Asama briefly had no idea what she meant. However...

...*Me!*?

“Eh!? No, u-um.”

She considered fleeing, but someone restrained her shoulders.

It was Kimi. Her arm held Asama from the outside.

...*Ah.*

Kimi looked to her brother with a smile, but the strength in her arm seemed to be urging Asama on.

Asama did her very best not to look in his direction as she spoke.

“Are you sure this won’t bother you, Horizon?”

“It might and it might not. But my greed is telling me how to avoid wrath and sorrow.” Horizon had the same calm look in her eyes as always. “I must be with as many people as possible and make sure I do not lose any of them.”

“—————”

“I have Toori-sama by my side, but he is a battery that says and does many odd things. On the other hand, I have friends with whom I can share our dreams and lifestyles. So I can’t help but wonder.”

Wonder what?

“Is it wrong to hope to be with as many people as possible until the day we die?”

Horizon’s words could be interpreted as a question to the others or to herself.

Asama did not know how to respond. But...

...*Wow.*

There was an answer. But not inside her.

“From a Shinto perspective...that could work.”



Asama did her best to calm her heart as she formed the words.

“Shinto already accepts the idea of a wife and concubines as a part of the history recreation. And once Matsudaira’s era begins, the custom of the *Ooku* harem will also begin,” explained Asama as Musashi’s Shinto representative. “Horizon, if you and Toori-kun become the Far East’s king, then it is perfectly possible.”

“Judge. Thank you very much.”

“Hey.”

He was the one who called out to her. She briefly looked his way.

...Uuh...

She belatedly grew self-conscious about how her words would be interpreted. But since Kimi smiled bitterly at no one in particular, it could not have been too bad. And...

“Is that your dream, Horizon?”

“No.” Horizon herself made an immediate denial. “That is a tentative hope for the future based on my greed, sorrow, wrath, and the envy that they create. I doubt I can fully share anything with you yet. But...”

“But? But what?”

Horizon paused to think and then nodded.

“My emotions began with sorrow, but I think that is why this desire has become the foundation of my dream. Not wanting to lose anything is a rejection of sorrow. And by starting from there,” she explained, “I want to be with everyone forever.”

“I see,” he said. “Then I’ll need to get my act together.”

Almost Everyone: “That ain’t happening...”

Me: “An immediate rejection!? And why was that one by Almost Everyone!?”

Gold Mar: “But I thought we were supposed to be sharing this kind of thing.”

“That’s right,” agreed Masazumi as Horizon raised her right hand.

“You are welcome to join us, Asama-sama.”

“N-no, um, I...”

For some reason, Mitotsudaira glared at her from beyond Horizon with a truly exhausted look on her face.

Asama felt like she was calling her a traitor, but...

“...I-I’ll give my answer from a Shinto perspective.”

“Judge. And what is that?”

“W-well, a shrine maiden has to put her god first, right? So my power would weaken if I put someone else first! And then we’d really be in trouble, right?”

“Indeed we would.”

“R-right!? Lots and lots of trouble! And the Asama Shrine kind of sees it as best to not get married if you can’t find an heiress!”

“Tomo?”

Mitotsudaira spoke to her from beyond Horizon who was nodding.

“So if you could only solve that problem, you would want to take her up on the offer?”

<Divine Transmission: Limited from Asama to Silver Wolf: Confirmed>

Asama: “Mitooooo!!”

Silver Wolf: “Oh? But you haven’t actually opened the lid. You did bring the whole bottle out, though.”

But Asama realized Horizon was nodding at her.

She thought the automaton was going to say something to her, but then Horizon turned toward Mitotsudaira instead.

“I see.”

...Y-you see what!? What did that mean!?

“I can see you both gave real thought to your answers. And even if there are problems, I now understand that my idea causes no problem from a history recreation perspective. Of course, you could say this is primarily an issue for Toori-sama and me, so while you are welcome to join us, we will not force you to.”

Asama now understood what Horizon meant, so she exchanged a glance with Mitotsudaira and...

“R-right!? You won’t force us to, right!?”

“Ha ha. Right!? You aren’t saying this all of a sudden begins tomorrow or anything, right!?”

Mal-Ga: “They just don’t know when to give up...”

Unturning: “I don’t think this has all that much to do with pride. It feels more like they’re failing to understand their situation here.”

Flat Vassal: “Y-you really do just go out and say what the rest of us were keeping quiet about, Date Vice Chancellor!”

Quiet, all of you.

But Asama once more looked to Mitotsudaira and they conversed via eye contact: *Wh-what are you going to do, Mito?*

Wh-what about you...!?

Meanwhile, Kimi placed her chin on top of Horizon’s head.

She then looked up as if soaking in a bath.

“This is so much fun.”

Asama: “Kimi...!!”

Silver Wolf: “Curse that girl...!”

“Heh heh,” laughed the idiot sister. “The rest is up to you.”

“...What is?”

Asama knew what Kimi was saying. After all, it was Kimi.

...She’s telling us to do as we wish, isn’t she?

Mitotsudaira silently agreed with Kimi.

That's right, she thought calmly with no preamble.

Horizon had said they were welcome and her king had agreed.

If she made the plunge, they would accept her.

But even if that would be her honest decision, she felt like it would make her too reliant on them.

...I have to wait until my king has properly approved of me.

Asama probably felt the same.

And as Kimi had said, all of that was up to them.

There was no need to become the summit's flower, but she did not want to succumb to the relief and unease of merely being accepted.

She wanted to be confident she had been both accepted and wanted for who she was.

...A-and it's not like I've decided that I'm going to go there!

Exactly.

And Horizon nodded as if responding to her thoughts.

"That is how I currently view the situation. What about you, Toori-sama?"

"Well, I feel like I don't have the capacity to accept everyone as king," said her king. "So if you wanna join us, come to my place. ...I might not be able to do it right away, but once I'm king, I intend to be able to feed everyone who wants to show up."

"Heh heh. Yes, you need quite a large budget to pay for Mitotsudaira's meat and Asama's sake."

"Yeah... I'm always relying on them, so I'm prepared to take care of that."

...Uuh...

Why did he have to say that? It was like a sort of confession.

...And it makes me want to help him...

If possible, she wanted a proper confession scene, but that too was dependent on them all, including him.

Unsure what to think of all this, Mitotsudaira breathed a heated sigh in her heart.

Horizon looked to her and then Asama with Kimi's chin still on her head.

"Then if you two ever feel like it, you are welcome to join us."

That offer briefly filled Mitotsudaira's chest with heat, but Asama...

"R-right!? If we ever feel like it! If! If that were to happen! Right, Mito!?"

...Are you stupid!?

It was best to put off this kind of decision until later.

Keeping the lid on was all well and good, but why did she have to get Mitotsudaira involved too? So Mitotsudaira looked over at Kimi.

Kimi looked back and silently narrowed her eyes.

"..."

She seemed to be saying "do it", so...

...Judge.

She gave Kimi a definite nod.

Beyond Kimi, Asama's smile froze in place and her face grew somewhat pale.

"Eh? Um, Mito? Kimi?"

Mitotsudaira did not care. She ignored Asama's question.

If you're going to drag me into it when you take this way too far, then I'll do the same to you.

"Horizon? We have the study camp soon, don't we?"

"Judge. Indeed we do."

"Do you know what a study camp is?"

"Judge. It is a practice run for the school trip. And that means it is built on a

foundation of deepening our bonds and mutual understanding.”

If she understood it that well, this would be easy. Mitotsudaira was aware she had a smile on her lips.

It was a nice smile. It could be described as refreshed or resolute.

And Asama must have realized what she was doing because her eyes opened wide.

“U-um, Mito!?”

She did not care.

Mitotsudaira opened her mouth to say it.

...Yes. This is merely a way of supporting you, Tomo.

“Horizon? We don’t actually know what will happen if your welcome invitation comes to fruition, do we?”

So...

“Just for the length of the study camp, how about we live together? By that I mean you, my king, Tomo, Kimi, me...and, yes, everyone else too.”

...Together!?

Asama felt all of her blood rapidly sink down and then rise back up just as quickly.

“Wai-...”

She could not get even the one word out.

...Eh?

No, it can’t be. That’s too much. It’s too forceful. Um...

“Starting today!?”

“Heh heh. Silly girl. The study camp begins tomorrow. We’re traveling today. We’ll probably be sleeping in the same tent at the campsite.”

...What are you saying!?

She wanted to protest. After all...

...I-I have my work for the Asama Shrine!

There was so much she had to do every day, such as her morning purification.

But Kimi looked to the top of Asama's head and tilted her own head.

"Oh, look at that. Hanami is adjusting your workload and contacting your father for you."

Asama looked up and saw Hanami silently working with her back to her.

"Um, Hanami? You don't have to send my father a request for permission... Oh, he's already approved it? You don't have to hide it from me, okay? Okay? Face this way."

Some of the others commented how smart her Mouse was, but she could not at all agree.

But before she could say anything, Horizon turned to face her.

"You will be coming then?"

"Y-yes?"

"Judge. I'm glad to hear it." Horizon gave her a thumbs up and nodded. "I greedily wish to be forever surrounded by happiness so that I will never feel sorrow or unease," she said. "But does anyone else feel the same way?"

Asama heard everyone fall silent when Horizon essentially called out to them.

No one said anything.

They simply soaked in the summer night air entering through the art room's window.

That lack of reaction continued for the span of several motionless breaths.

But, thought Asama. When I think about it, this stillness is not a bad thing.

...After all, this means...

With this and what she had said before, Horizon could speak with them much more than she used to.

And...

...She really is greedy.

The desire to be forever surrounded by happiness was something everyone wanted but avoided mentioning. They all knew it simply was not possible.

But her greed desired it. She wanted it very badly, but since she could not have it...

“You’re giving it to us, aren’t you?”

“Judge. ...I really cannot do anything on my own, so...”

“Hey, Horizon, I’ve got first dibs,” said the idiot. “After all, I’ll die if I get sad.”

He raised his hand from beyond the window.

That was not why, but Asama did feel she gained a motivation inside her heart.

“You leave me no choice...”

“Oh?” said Kimi while narrowing her eyes, but Asama ignored it.

There were a lot of decisions to make, but she did not have to do so right away. So...

“It is my duty to manage you and purify you if you start feeling sad, Toori-kun.”

“So we will be sharing Toori-sama.”

...Kh!

That was too blunt. Mito looked like she had been planning to say something after Asama, but she now clamped her mouth shut and faced forward. She had realized saying anything would expose her to this direct attack.

...Come to think of it, Toori-kun falls victim to this all the time...

She was oddly impressed, but that was just how it was.

She then spoke to Horizon.

“So the study camp will also be a sleepover party.”

“Judge,” agreed Horizon.

Then someone spoke from behind them.

It was Suzu and she started by taking a breath.

“That...reminds me of the past...”

However, she then fainted and collapsed backwards. Adele quickly stepped over and caught her.

“Watch out! ...Wait, wh-what is this!? They’re even bigger than back in England!? D-damn! Oh, wait, I mustn’t curse. B-but still, what is this!?”

Adele turned to face Asama.

“Do they get bigger if you consider accepting that offer!? ...Oh, no wait. The 5th Special Duty Officer disproves that pretty soundly. Sorry. I was mistaken.”

“Why are you dragging me into this!?”

“Now, now,” said Asama as she glanced over at the window.

The nudist was there. That was the usual scene, but it felt somehow different from normal.

...Yes.

She recalled that he had said he did not want anyone else to see them changing. So...

“W-wait, Mito.”

“Huh? What is it?”

Asama ducked below Kimi’s arm, grabbed Mitotsudaira’s hand, and tugged her over.

“Let’s go to the bathroom. I feel like...uh...washing my face to feel nice and purified. Please accompany me.”

Chapter 38: Roller in the Night

第三十八章

『夜間の転がり者』



If you are truly resolute

Will you give a good answer?

Point Allocation (Too Much of One)

Two figures stood in the night.

They stood at a slight clearing on an otherwise tree-covered slope.

One was Sanada Academy Unneeded #5 Anayama and the other was #9 Nezu.

Anayama held nothing and Nezu spread out a sign frame.

They looked overhead where the sky was dyed with the colors of night.

And something was flying there.

"I never thought the elder young master and the Principal would call Musashi here."

"Shall we board them, Anayama?"

"Given what happened last time, I wouldn't recommend it. Since they're traveling to Sanada land, I imagine their defenses will be on high alert."

"How cowardly of you..."

Anayama nodded at Nezu's comment.

"I'm glad to see your ellipses are back."

"Unfortunately, I already used one back at lunchtime. When the wasabi fell in my udon at the cafeteria."

"Did you say 'how spicy...'?"

"No. I said 'I don't like this very much...' I prefer not to directly reject anything..."

"Well done," said Anayama, but Nezu ignored him and looked up into the sky.

"The Principal is back, isn't he?"

"The elder young master was forcibly sent back as well."

"That guy..." said Nezu as he held his sign frame up into the sky. It displayed

the Musashi from when it was on the way to Novgorod and he overlaid it with the current view of the Musashi to view the differences.

After a few seconds of observation, he jotted down some notes on the sign frame.

“The additional thrusters on the port and starboard of the front central ship are sticking out a bit.”

“If Isa-kun was here, she could probably tell us why.”

“Could you not suddenly bring up the sentimentality I was trying to forget?”

“I think the proper way to remember the dead is to mention those things until they fade away naturally.”

“You like immersing yourself in memories more than I do, don’t you?”

“Testament,” said Anayama. And then...

“Nezu-kun. Anayama.”

They heard the solid sound of someone stepping on the grass further up the slope.

It was the light footsteps of a girl. Nezu looked back and wrinkled his brow.

“Yuri. I could hear your footsteps.”

Yuri’s voice reached them from the shadows of the forest’s depths.

“Our great teacher checked the ‘pulse’ in my leg and said I should do some walking.”

“You must have walked quite a bit. And at lunchtime, you could only manage one lap of the schoolyard.”

“Yeah,” said Yuri as she stepped out into the moonlight.

She had long hair and a white uniform. She wore a scythe on either hip, but she carried a staff in her left hand.

“He told me that going to meet someone would mean walking more while also allowing them to help me if I needed it.”

“He’s too easy on you...”

Nezu breathed an exasperated sigh and lowered his shoulders, but...

“That isn’t the only reason you’re here, is it?”

“Testament. The teachers say they’re going into the ruins.”

“They went in there!?”

“Nezu-kun.”

Anayama raised his right hand to stop Nezu.

Nezu had raised his voice and Yuri faced him with a bitter smile and lowered shoulders. And as Anayama faced both of them...

“———”

“...That’s not how you do it, Anayama-san. At times like this, the polite thing to do is gently say, ‘...Listen.’ ”

Nezu sighed again and placed a hand on his forehead.

“And I was hoping to wish our teachers good luck.”

“I tried, but Saizou-sensei laughed and mocked the idea of humans wishing dragons good luck.”

But...

“He also said he knows we’re on their side.”

“———”

“Nezu-kun! So was this the appropriate time for a ‘———’!?”

“What are you hoping to accomplish, Anayama...?”

Nezu sighed and walked toward Yuri.

Anayama looked up into the sky and pointed toward the Musashi.

“What about this?”

“I’ve already recorded plenty, so let’s hurry back. If the teachers have left, we need to inspect the school building. Isn’t that why you’re here, Yuri?”

“Testament. There are places the other students and I can’t reach.”

“Understood.”

Nezu nodded and walked past Yuri. She looked back and started to say something to him.

“...”

“Yuri-kun! So was that the appropriate time for an ellipsis?”

“Are you okay, Anayama?”

“Knowing how you younger children behave is part of my job.”

“I see,” said Yuri as she and Anayama faced forward to see Nezu come to a stop.

“Hurry up. Have you contacted the others?”

“The young master told Sasuke-san and Saizou-san to go on ahead to Osaka.”

Anayama reacted to Yuri’s words.

“————”

“See? You can do it, Anayama-san.”

“So I did that right!?”

“...”

“What is that silence for, you two?”

“Well.” Yuri smiled with the ends of her eyebrows lowered. “Thank you, Anayama.”

“It’s only natural for an upperclassman to look after his underclassmen. That said, Kakei-kun and Unno-kun are supposed to be your superiors, but they’re gone at the moment.”

“I hope they can make it back soon...” said Nezu as he resumed walking.

Anayama followed from behind Yuri and responded with a frown.

“Hmm, but their mission hasn’t been called off yet.”

Also...

“If the young master is looking ahead to the Siege of Osaka, then that will be

our time to shine. The Musashi might be flying overhead, but at this point, it is nothing more than a source of information to sell to the other nations.”

Yuri and Anayama looked up into the night sky and heard the wind moving gently through it.

The Musashi had begun to brake.

“While remaining wary of a battle with us, they will apparently send down a transport ship for ‘sightseeing’ and an ‘educational investigation’. Of course, our teachers have entered the ruins they will be investigating,” said Anayama. “Now, then. We can see what the future holds for us...but what about the others?”

“Roi-Soleil, isn’t it about time you got to bed?”

A voice was carried by the somewhat humid movement of air that was the summer night wind.

A large garden existed at the entrance of a building that stretched out to the east and west. The white entranceway looked like a stage and a nudist stood upon it with his flared hair blowing in the wind.

He looked back with his hands on his hips.

“Have we received word from Terumoto on the front line, Henri?”

“Testament. She said, ‘Cover up and get to sleep.’ ”

“In that case, you could say that Terumoto is both worried and hopeful for me.”

Henri briefly looked up into the sky with a serious look on her face.

Then another figure appeared next to her with solid footsteps.

“Armand. ...I was just thinking how confusing people with hearts are.”

“Testament. I have thought the same thing quite a bit. ...Now, Roi-Soleil.”

“What is it, Armand? Have we received further word from Terumoto on the front line?”

“Testament. ...Oh, but this is actually for Henri, not you. Hey, Henri. The princess said, ‘If the idiot hasn’t gone to sleep after an hour, aim for his crotch with a wooden sword.’ ”

“Heh. Oh, Terumoto... You mustn’t leave this to others just because you have such difficulty expressing your love.”

“No, Roi-Soleil. Are you an ‘idiot’ as she claims?”

“Most every man who has fallen in love could be called an idiot.”

The Roi-Soleil crossed his arms as he spoke.

He then turned away from Henri and Armand and spread his arms.

He spread those arms as if to embrace and support something: “This is the nightscape of Paris. ...A note in the Testament says it will later be divided into different districts and mostly comprised of high-rise apartments, but in my era, it is an extremely dense collection of wooden and stone buildings. However...” He looked back toward them. “That is why I can see the people at work. I believe this École de Paris has inherited everything Anne saw day by day from her bed. And at this time of night, I wonder if all of those lights indicate the people performing a more erotic sort of activity.”

“That is something I wish Lady Anne could have heard. Oh, and I sent it to Lady Terumoto.”

“How did she respond?”

“ ‘Swing it straight down at him.’ ”

“With such a specific command, I suppose I can’t say she is simply leaving this to others.”

The Roi-Soleil turned back toward Henri, puffed out his chest, and slapped his stomach with his right hand.

“Now, do it.”

Henri immediately did so. A sharp sound of impact rang out and after a while...

“————”

With no change of expression, Exiv toppled backwards.

He remained motionless for a few seconds, but then he uttered a “heh” of laughter and stood back up.

“Unlike when Terumoto does it, I can’t really feel it in the core of my being. Terumoto’s really sticks with you after the fact.”

“Isn’t that dangerous?”

Henri sent a divine mail using a *signe cadre* and a response soon arrived.

“Roi-Soleil. She says, ‘Ha ha ha. You actually did it?’ ”

“Heh. Terumoto, these are the acts of a fool in love. Do you understand?” Exiv spread out his arms once more and held them up toward the moon. “Normally, you would not think of letting someone strike you in the dick with a wooden sword, would you?”

“Statistically speaking, I have determined it is indeed a strange thing to do.”

“Yes. So even if someone else loves Terumoto, this dick damage is proof that my love for her is deeper!”

“Then it would be that lack of depth that prevented my strike from reaching the core of your being.”

Henri nodded in understanding and Armand crossed his arms next to her.

“Henri. ...So is this what love is?”

“Armand. ...This is a special case.”

“Really?” Armand tilted his head. “I hear Musashi’s Chancellor often lets their princess punch him in the crotch.”

“Heh. That false nudist has been doing that?”

“Testament.” Armand nodded. “Roi-Soleil. Which is a sign of deeper love: a bare hand or a wooden sword?”

A room was surrounded by white walls and a white floor.

It was a white-tiled bath, but in the center...

“Lady Terumoto, I apologize that we could only supply a free-flowing bath due to the Pension Versailles’s safety standards. But I made sure the tub was made from the cypress you like, so please forgive me.”

“Yeah, don’t worry about it. In fact, this is more than I could have hoped for, Mouri-01. You and the other biological *Belle de Marionnettes* need to join me in here.”

Terumoto said that as she placed a towel on her head and leaned back against the edge of the tub.

Mouri-01 was wearing a towel and soaking Terumoto’s clothes in a bucket of lukewarm water.

“Lady Terumoto, you should probably get a new summer uniform before long.”

“Yeah, I tend to be pretty rough on them.”

As she said that, a *signe cadre* appeared next to her face. It displayed...

“Mouri-03? What is it?”

“Oh, um, Terumoto!”

Mouri-03 casually wore a summer uniform and clenched her fists as she answered.

“The Roi-Soleil sent a divine mail asking you to punch him in the dick barehanded!”

“Roi-Soleil. ...She responded with a single word: die.”

“Heh. Are you feeling shy, Terumoto! But this is a battle between a false nudist and a true nudist! And it is a physical battle with love on the line.”

Armand typed that line into his *signe cadre*.

“Henri, should I really be doing this?”

“Why do you always question everything?”

The response arrived.

“Roi-Soleil. ...She said, ‘Leave it to me.’ ”

In Musashi Ariadust Academy, they had finished the physical examination and everyone was preparing to leave.

As everyone gathered their things in the classroom while drifting toward the entrance, Asama checked the sign frame that Hanami tossed her way.

“Huh?”

She frowned.

Suzu noticed her odd reaction and tilted her head.

“Wh-what is...it?”

“Oh, well, um... Toori-kun just received an odd spam message from Hexagone Française.”

“Huh? What kind of message?”

“Well, it says something about ‘my di-...’, oh whoops! I almost read that out loud!”

“Heh heh. Silly girl. Just reply with an offensive counter spell attached. They’re Catholic, but the Asama Shrine has been researching spells that will work on them, right?”

“You have a point.” Horizon gave Asama a thumbs up. “I approve.”

“R-Roi-Soleil! We just received a Catholic lightning punishment for illicit sex! I never expected a reply from Musashi to include a Catholic-style trap!”

Henri quickly activated a first aid spell as the sun nudist lay sprawled out on the ground with electricity and smoke rising from his crotch. Next to her, Armand crossed his arms.

“Since this worked on him, he must have a proper division between church and state.”

“Naming yourself emperor does come with its own risks.”

But then the Roi-Soleil moved.

He breathed air into his lower stomach and got up. He then took another breath and slowly swept his flared hair back. He also puffed out his chest and turned his sharp gaze toward the two *Belle de Marionnettes*.

“My eyes have been opened, Henri and Armand. This is a time of war.”

“Henri. ...I think I want to say something about that.”

“You are imagining it. Don’t say anything.”

“Silence required,” added a *signe cadre* from Isaac.

Exiv narrowed his eyes.

“There is nothing wrong with Terumoto, so the front line must be safe. ...But what about the Hashiba forces?”

“Testament. We estimate they will leave the forest region tomorrow afternoon.”

“I see.” The Roi-Soleil nodded. “Will they make it here by nightfall the day after next?”

“We have determined that is their planned schedule.”

“Then,” said Exiv as he crossed his arms and viewed his surroundings.

But instead of the city of Paris, he was viewing the hills around it.

“Will the flooding meant for Mouri’s fortress be ready by that night?”

“Most likely,” replied Armand. “The Azuchi Castle is on its way here, but it will not immediately join the rest of the Hashiba forces. It seems to be timing its journey on the outer edge of M.H.R.R. so it can join them after they pass through the southern forest and arrive above the urban region. However, nudist...I mean, Roi-Soleil.”

Henri lightly kicked Armand’s leg to get him to change how he referred to their king.

“The Azuchi Castle is traveling at low speed,” he continued. “The most

urgently needed of the supplies it carries are being sent ahead to Takenaka's unit with transport ships."

"Do you know why they are doing that?"

"Testament." Henri opened a *signe cadre*. "Roi-Soleil. ...I can only provide our best guess."

"Let's hear it."

"Testament." Henri displayed an image drawn with detailed etching. "This is the Azuchi as observed from the metal tower located near Magdeburg in northern M.H.R.R. ...Each ship has construction materials visibly loaded on top. And that includes the 1st ships which bear its main cannon and secondary cannons."

"I see." The Roi-Soleil nodded. "Do you think they will be using those materials to block off the river downstream of Paris to flood the city?"

"Testament. ...Paris is a large city, so they would need a great quantity of materials."

Henri displayed a map of Paris.

As a whole, the city was a circle. Henri drew a red arc that surrounded the downstream side.

"Paris's radius is about 12km. To surround this much space and quickly create a dam that will not break, they will likely need to use transport ships as a dam and use the many materials to fill the holes and reinforce the dam. Now, transporting all of those materials at once would normally require a massive number of transport ships. However..."

"The ability of a large transport ship group to safely carry anything is always a concern and managing the fleet on site can be difficult. So they used the Azuchi instead. Is that it?"

"Testament. But we provided a situation that Hashiba did not expect."

That was...

"New tactics and new weapons. ...I have determined the new shells in particular could bring unexpected danger or malfunction to the Azuchi."

“So not even you think this could bring it down.”

“...Perhaps if we joined the fight using these new tactics.”

“Heh. This is all thanks to the Reine des Garous’s crazy ideas. Her relative ignorance of standard Hexagone Française tactics allows her to come up with all of these unthinkable ones.”

“Testament.” Henri nodded and then hung her head. “It was difficult rejecting all of the unfair tactics that would have stained the honor of Hexagone Française and the princess...”

“Oh? What’s the matter, honey? Why are you covering your face and sobbing? Hee hee. Come now, I only did what I promised. Yes, just as you begged me, this time is for ‘only looking’. If you let me manipulate you just by looking at you, then you lose. If the time runs out, then I lose. ...And whoever loses has to make a request to the winner. All I can do is look, so you have an incredible advantage here. There are still 2 hours to go, but I just don’t see how I can win when I can only look. Hee hee. I think I might just lose this one. Yes, and I will make sure to follow the rules. All I will do is take a look. ...Yes, take a look at your flavor.”

“The Reine des Garous is willing to lie even to us, so it can be incredibly difficult to judge how unfair or proper her tactics are.”

“Yes, she is a truly free person. Anne liked that about her.”

The Roi-Soleil smiled and looked into the southeastern sky where the Azuchi would be.

“Now not even the Azuchi can carelessly enter Hexagone Française territory. This is the effect of the Reine des Garous, our new weapons, and our new tactics. They will have to remain at low speed at least until they reach flatter ground. And thanks to that...yes, we can send our front line quite far out there. But,” he added, “Hashiba is doing quite well, too. Instead of forcing their way through to flood Paris, they are using their own strategy and changing it when necessary.”

“Yes, but...”

“Testament.” Exiv nodded. “Hashiba destroyed Edo and Satomi with a dragon line reactor, but the lumber used to construct the two cities would have remained in the forest regions upstream of Edo and Satomi. So Hashiba bought that up and negotiated for the reserve lumber to gather cheap materials in a short period of time. ...That is a splendid strategy. After all, that gives them two cities’ worth of materials. That should be enough to surround Paris. Also,” he continued. “Even with all that, it seems to have taken two weeks to reach the amount of materials needed for the task. ...But I imagine their original plan during the Battle of Novgorod was to provide supplies and support to Novgorod, carry the materials to Lake Biwa Azuchi, and load even more materials gathered from other regions there.”

“But,” said Henri. She compared what Exiv had said to the reports from the various Committee Heads. “During the Battle of Novgorod, Azuchi was unable to move due to the deterrence from Date and Mogami. Thus, they likely determined gathering materials from other regions at Lake Biwa Azuchi was not the best plan. It seems the materials at Lake Biwa Azuchi were redistributed across their territory.”

“I have not received any information about where that went. Have you?”

“No. The transport ships meant to be used for the dam were most likely distributed as well, so that allowed it to scatter around too quickly to track. That is why we do not know where it went.”

“There is no helping that then,” said Exiv as he smiled in the direction of the Azuchi.

The Roi-Soleil’s eyes then turned due east, toward Sviet Rus.

“In truth, that Battle of Novgorod gave us a bit of breathing room.”

The two *Belle de Marionnettes* could not respond to that.

Accepting their king’s words would mean admitting Musashi had been effective. And as those two failed to respond, the Roi-Soleil spoke quietly.

“And yesterday, the Shirasagi Castle was lost.”

That was the truth.

“As a result, we no longer need to consider one of the more troublesome ships Hashiba could have sent in to support them. A warship that can remain at ultra-high altitude for long periods of time is very difficult to deal with when defending a city.”

“Roi-Soleil, how do you view Musashi?”

“That is a difficult question to answer. Because I should probably make a joint answer with Terumoto.”

Once he said that, they heard a loud sound from the distant sky.

Henri briefly narrowed her eyes and finally nodded.

“That was a dragon. The southern clan has been making a lot of noise since the other day.” She looked to the south. “They handled the majority of the Germanic migration and nearly conquered the land for a time. After they were held in check by climate change and the Testament Cross-Borders Unit, those which sought reconciliation left to the east during the Harmonic Unification War and those who sought to rule remained in Europe but eventually stopped descending from the mountains.”

“What do you think that distant roar meant?”

“I do not know.” Henri tilted her head. “But it sounded like they were seeking more of their kind.”

Mitotsudaira was utterly exhausted.

Back in her own home, she lay face down in her bed with her butt sticking up in the air.

Returning from the academy and sending some quick instructions to her corporations was all she had managed.

...This is too much in so many ways!

She wanted to know what was going on, but she could not complain when she had been the one making it worse towards the end.

“Honestly...”

With Horizon in control, Horizon and her king were trying to take responsibility concerning the others.

...Wh-what does that even mean!?

As his knight, could she view it as serving him in his castle as an aide? Except this was more like being part of his family. Or rather...

...Sharing him!?

How much was she supposed to share?

Of course, Horizon had said something about “until the day we die”, but...

“...Uuuuhh...”

She still was not sure just how serious Horizon had been.

She also wondered if Horizon would continue to think like this.

After all, she had yet to retrieve all of her emotions. But Mitotsudaira knew they could not agree to this while hoping Horizon would change her mind later.

...In that case...

“Th-this was just my king being fairly accepting of anything and Horizon could always change her mind, right!? Isn’t that all this is?”

She asked her blanket, but it did not answer her. Why had she not asked them that earlier?

“Khhh...”

I have no guts at all, she thought, but that too was an excuse.

...I am a knight.

If her king gave her something, that would be one thing, but she could not hope for it herself. However...

“My king did say he was okay with it...”

She groaned in doubt and could not find an answer.

Then she thought in silence for a few seconds.

...What would I do if my king and Horizon were serious?

Hypothetically, she thought.

“Y-yes, just hypothetically.”

She thought about it.

“Well...”

In their “battle formation” the day before, Horizon had been next to her king and she had been in front.

She tried to think about her king’s castle, but this was the Far East and Musashi. There was no castle. That would make the location his home, but where could they make that formation in his home?

...The Main Blue Thunder?

She pictured it as sitting across the table from him, but that was different from standing out in front of him. She could not protect him if she was facing him across a table.

If she was to do that inside the restaurant...

“I would have to be below the table at his feet...!”

She imagined herself with a collar around her neck, a rope attached to that, waiting for her king to feed her some table scraps, getting too excited, and climbing up onto his lap.

“M-my mind has been poisoned by our class’s jokes!”

She frantically sat up.

She kept her butt off the bed as she fixed her clothing and cleared her throat.

She slapped her cheeks lightly, but...

“H-he wouldn’t actually treat me like a pet, would he?”

The silver wolf placed her hands in front of her and lay down starting with her chin. She raised her butt and reached her hands between her knees.

“That’s right.” She lifted her eyebrows. “Besides, there isn’t really a place in his house where he, Horizon, and I could recreate that formati-...”

She stopped there.

...Somewhere where the three of us could recreate that formation.

“Wouldn’t that be...?”

Something came to mind. Her eyes widened a bit as she discovered the answer.

...The bed.

The bed in his room.

She and Asama had borrowed that bed to sleep in the other day, so she knew it was fairly spacious. Three or four people might be difficult, but they could make it work. And the floor was carpeted. If they closed the curtains, brought in Kimi’s bed from the neighboring room, and combined the two beds, six people could fit easily.

“Sniff...”

Without thinking, she closed her eyes and sniffed the bed below her. However, it did not smell like him.

“...Ah.”

She frantically brought her mind back to reality.

This was her own home. It was not the Main Blue Thunder or his room. And yet...

“Wh-what am I thinking!?”

No, this was not something she should be thinking even if she was at the Main Blue Thunder or his room, so she corrected her statement.

“There’s something wrong with me...”

That is the correct statement. Yes.

Besides, she began in her heart.

...In that case, I would be in front...

She thought about what position that would place her in.

And at this very moment, she had her butt sticking up behind her with her

face half-buried in the blanket. She imagined having someone behind her while she was in this pose.

And a few seconds after she began...

“Th-that’s far too direct!”

She got up. And after lowering her hips into a sitting position, her hair felt in the way behind her.

“If I’m in front, I need to do this...”

She opened a space between the left side of her hair and her back. Would he be able to sit there? She imagined feeling his warmth enveloping her.

“Uuh...”

And she could also imagine Horizon watching her from the side. Also...

“Oh? Mitotsudaira-sama, why are you holding back? Here, here. Broadly defined, you could call this a meat dish.”

“I-I can’t be the only one doing this! You go first, Horizon!”

“Don’t you dare use a knife on my ‘meat dish’! And don’t try give it a salt massage either!? Got that!?”

“Now, Mitotsudaira-sama, say ‘ah’.”

After her imagination ran that far, Mitotsudaira came back to her senses.

She was already sitting up, so she rolled backwards instead.

“If we’re sharing him, then Horizon would have absolute control, wouldn’t she?”

But wasn’t this the same as when they had fed her yakiniku at England? When she thought about it, she realized it had been the same at IZUMO too. Not to mention when they chose her choker at Mito. Which meant...

“...Is this any different than normal?”

But in that case, there was something wrong with her “normal”.

“Ahyahhh...”

Mitotsudaira covered her blushing face with her hands and curled up with her

defenseless belly pointed up. Then she looked to the ceiling. She lowered her hands, sighed, and...

“I...”

I’m hopeless, she earnestly thought.

Mitotsudaira sighed again.

She twisted her curled-up body on the bed and brought her right index finger to her mouth.

“I can’t believe myself.”

...How could I imagine those things about my king and princess?

She thought her imagination had been quite realistic, but even so...

“Getting this excited about it makes me unworthy to be his knight.”

With that, she narrowed her eyes and looked to the left and right.

There was no one around and no sign frames were appearing.

...I had a feeling a tsukkomi would be coming right about now.

Calm down, Nate Mitotsudaira. When you aren’t at the academy or on the battlefield, no one is going to make a tsukkomi no matter what you think.

So, she added.

“Am I allowed to have lewd thoughts when I’m in a private location?”

...Yes! That’s right!

My public and private lives are separate. I am free to do as I wish in my own space. And if I defile something important there, I only need to act in good faith while in public to purify it.

“Even my king thinks about lewd things when he’s alone in his private life.”

She was suddenly curious, so she sent a divine transmission to connect the private with the public.

“Um, my king?”

“Oh? Nate? What is it? I was about to play another porn game. Sis and I are planning to read it aloud together, but you wanna join us? It’s an adventure type, so it’s pretty fun.”

His insanity was a little too direct, so she ended the divine transmission.

And after a few seconds...

...Oh, that’s right...

Her king was the type to keep everything out in the open. She remembered that he was nude more often than not and he had that sister with him. Plus, if their sharing life began, Mitotsudaira would have to deal with those two and Horizon all at once.

“I get the feeling I would be powerless to resist them...”

But, she thought.

“Why am I always naked when I imagine those scenes?”

Was it because that idiot was her king? Or...

“Ah.”

She grew pale when another possibility occurred to her.

She quickly sat back up.

“Could this be my mother’s blood...?”

That frightening possibility left her dumbfounded. And at that very moment, a sign frame from Kimi popped up.

“Mitotsudaira! The heroine is a dog girl! Come on over! C’mon! Shake! ...Oh, you can do it via divine transmission if you want! Repeat after me: ‘Well done making it here. This is Koumon World, the Land of Natto.’ ”

“What are you talking about...!?”

“Silly girl. The study camp starts tomorrow, so we’re finishing up these porn games while we can! We just finished a shrine maiden porn game, so now we’re doing a national pilgrimage game titled ‘Koumon-sama’s Crest’! Ah, foolish brother! Don’t continue on without me. C’mon, Mitotsudaira. Repeat after me: ‘Mh, you’ll give me a bone? Pant, pant, gasp, gasp... No, I can’t take anymore.’ ”

“That heroine fell for you way too fast!”

“What are you talking about? That’s just my foolish brother being really good at choosing the best option! He’s the three-choice technician! The average player would have chosen the peanuts there!”

“Peanuts are from the next nation to the south! And that heroine isn’t modeled after me, is she!?”

“Oh, don’t worry about that. No, nothing at all to worry about there, so rest easy. ...Yes, she looks nothing at all like you. I mean, all that hair would have been a pain to draw, so they cut it down to three drills. So she doesn’t look like you at all.”

“I don’t think I’ve ever believed something less!”

“Heh heh. You sure are lively. ...Oh, what is it, foolish brother? The protagonist can’t stand it anymore after only 3 clicks? You need to do better than that. C’mon, Mitotsudaira, let’s go win over that heroine!”

Mitotsudaira ended the divine transmission, but immediately regretted it.

...If I had gone along with that, would it have opened up a brand new world for me!?

Perhaps so.

She tried groaning meaninglessly into empty air, but when she thought about it, this was normal for her. If she did try leaping into that world, it would not open up for her. People would only see it as her setting foot on the road leading to it.

“Honestly...”

She decided she needed a change of pace.

She wondered if she could discuss how she felt with someone who had received similar damage and had also been left on the outskirts of that world. So...

...Let’s see...

“Um, Tomo?”

She heard a voice in response:

“Nn...ah.”

“Wh-what kind of weird noises are you making!?”

Mitotsudaira protested to keep up appearances, and...

“Eh!? N-no, you misunderstand, Mito! That wasn’t me! It was the porn game I’m poison testing!”

“Ho ho?”

“Ah, you don’t believe me, do you!? I’m in the spring to maintain a purified state while I poison test it. Shall I turn up the volume so you can hear?”

This lunatic was rather impressive as well. But Asama said more, perhaps to fill the gap in the conversation.

“The character just now was a lot like you.”

“You’re playing Part 2 of something, aren’t you!?”

Mitotsudaira realized her question had been a careless one. After all, Asama briefly but definitely fell silent. And then...

“How did you know that, Mito?”

“W-well, um. uh...”

There was no point in hiding it. They were friends. So Mitotsudaira cleared her throat.

“I-I received a divine transmission from Kimi just now. She said she and my king are playing Part 1 of a porn game modeled after Mito Mitsukuni.”

“Eh? But just a bit ago, they told me they were playing one based on Konohana no Sakuya, so...”

Asama swallowed the rest of her sentence.

Silence fell.

This time, it was Mitotsudaira’s turn to say something.

“Kimi mentioned that they had just finished a shrine maiden one.”

“Oh, so they went with the one modeled after me first...”

“Yes, and they must have gone with me last...”

When she said that, Mitotsudaira felt a strange emotion appear deep in her chest.

...Uuh...

First and last.

Tactically, both of those were important positions. Would you head out front or stay in the back? And the same naturally applied to choosing porn games.

You could move out front and launch a high-speed attack.

You could also stay back and launch a surefire *iai* attack.

Had he viewed them both as important?

But she could not let those thoughts trap her. So she focused her mind on the virtue of devotion, and...

“Th-they must have been prioritizing the one modeled after you, Tomo. Probably.”

“N-no, they must have been saving the one modeled after you to be the star of the night. Probably.”

...Oh, no.

She had dug her own grave on this one. And Tomo probably felt the same way about herself. But...

“They probably have one modeled after Horizon for very last, right?”

“No, Mito, automatons and silver hair aren’t very big right now. Things will head back in that direction eventually, but probably not until around fall.”

“A sommelier! Are you a sommelier!?”

But, thought Mitotsudaira.

“I never thought I would be so emotionally involved in how my king played porn games.”

“And Kimi is with him too.”

When she thought about it...

“It would be helpful to have Horizon there too. ...She could keep things under control.”

“That’s right...” said Asama before gasping. “B-but I haven’t decided I’m going! I have the Asama Shrine to deal with!”

She really doesn’t know when to give up, does she? thought Mitotsudaira while feeling rather impressed with how stubborn her friend was. However...

“———?”

She heard a distant sound in the sky.

...Something is falling?

No, that was not it. This was something else. It was definitely an incredibly massive object, but...

“ ‘Musashi’ to all ships! A high-speed flying object is approaching...no, forcibly landing. Over.”

“Musashi’s” warning continued while alarms sounded from Musashino to port.

...Forcibly landing?

A transport ship collision could be stopped by concentrating several layers of defense barriers, but what could slip past those and then land instead of collide?

Could it be? she wondered as “Musashi” said more.

“We have identified it as a normal student from Sanada Academy. ...Sanada has sent identification: this is Student #7, Kakei Torahide-sama. He is a Terrestrial-type flying dragon of the Lindwurm clan. He is approximately 120m long. Any who are capable of shipboard combat, please fight back. Over.”

Chapter 39: Dragon Visitor in the Straight Line Night

第三十九章

『直夜からの来訪竜』

挨拶は体当たり
返す言葉は何か
配点 (迎撃)



If the greeting is a tackle

What should your response be?

Point Allocation (Counterattack)

The visitor arrived along a straight line.

The dragon was 120m long. The Lindwurm variety was a high-speed flying dragon that had wings but lacked rear legs.

He had a very long body. But he was not all that large for the Musashi which was used to having aerial ships coming and going.

The problem was how he was flying.

That 120m mass of flesh, bone, and armor was dropping headfirst from the sky like a hammer.

The enemy-detection team of Musashi automatons had been unable to immediately define his approach and trajectory. The flight of wild Terrestrial Dragons was often seen while cruising and it was not all that unusual to have one pass by overhead.

That was why they had allowed him to suddenly drop down from a point 4km directly above the Musashi.

Musashi's enemy-detection team had of course made an immediate decision. As this was a dragon, they had used directional voice projection instead of a divine transmission to contact him.

"A question: Are you falling because you are feeling unwell or overcome with sudden illness? Or have you fallen unconscious? Over."

There was no response, so the automatons sent more words.

They asked for his affiliation, identification, age, name, address, personal history, *etc.* They also asked why he was falling and what his future plans were.

But there was no response.

So the automatons were unsure what to do. They were out of ideas. The more persistent ones attempted to convince him to stop his fall by singing

songs that would remind him of his homeland or asking him about memories of his mother, but there was no sign of it having any effect.

They sent their opinions to Musashino's bridge. As aides to "Musashino", "Kunitachi" and "Kokubunji" gathered the opinions and published 78 suggested solutions. As a result, "Musashino" guessed this dragon was from Sanada and passed the issue off to someone else.

" 'Musashi'-sama, please check with Sanada about this information. Over."

"Why me? Over."

"Judge," said "Musashino" while welcoming Suzu who was carried onto the bridge piggyback style by "Nishi Kokubunji". "Please have Sakai-sama check with Sanada about this information. Over."

"Sakai-sama. Your tea. Over."

"Musashi" served tea to Sakai who sat on a bench in the central street's rest area below the academy. A strained roar reached them from the distant sky, but Sakai did not bother looking up.

"Oh, thank you, 'Musashi'-san. ...Do you have today's evening paper?"

"Judge. I handed that to 'Okutama' because you said you had something to look at, but should I go retrieve it? Over."

"Oh, right. Tamako detected something up above, didn't she?"

"Sakai-sama, have you realized something about that thing up there? Over."

" 'Musashi'-sama, could you wrap this up a little more quickly? Over."

"Musashi" immediately closed the sign frame that appeared from "Musashino".

Sakai looked back and tilted his head.

" 'Musashi'-san? What is it?"

"Only a trivial matter, so don't worry about it. Anyway, Sakai-sama, about the dragon falling straight toward us. Is he perhaps a friend of yours? Over."

“Yeah, that’s probably Sanada’s Kakei Torahide. He was a pretty major Lindwurm in England. I had a slight scuffle with him back when I went to Sanada. He’s got to be pretty old by now.”

Sakai then asked a question.

“So what do you want me to do? Confirm who it is with Sanada? I could ask Masayuki-san, but I bet he’ll just say it’s part of the entertainment to welcome us.”

When they checked with Sanada Masayuki, he did indeed announce it was some entertainment to welcome Musashi to Sanada.

“This is an act of welcoming from one academy to another. We can view it as a mock battle. Thus, we have identified the approaching dragon as an ‘enemy’. Individual name ‘Torahide’ confirmed. Over.”

The enemy completed his fall immediately afterwards.

The counterattack began with a decision on Musashino’s bridge. The cannons across the Musashi were already aimed at Torahide, but...

“Suzu-sama.”

“Y-yes?”

“About the dragon descending from above, shall we shoot-...”

“ ‘Musashino’-sama! The enemy is accelerating! He is moving too fast to intercept!!”

“Musashino” frowned slightly.

“I apologize, Suzu-sama. The delay introduced by my superior has had some detrimental effects. I believe we can get your approval to fire next time. Now, please look forward to seeing the defense barriers activate. Over.”

“R-right. Judge.”

As soon as Suzu nodded, light filled the large sign frame at the front of the bridge. It displayed the sky above Musashino, where...

“Activate defense barriers at anti-ship density! Over.”

The dragon named Torahide saw the enemy's reaction.

Defense barriers stacked up along his path down.

Defense barriers were a defensive method, but from the looks of this...

"Ho ho..."

He let out an impressed breath.

"That is a perfectly fine weapon for attack...!"

He did not hesitate to drop down.

He used his divine protections as a dragon and blasted his dragon cannon from all of his body's thrusters to propel his 120-meter and 520-ton body straight down.

He flew in a straight line.

Torahide was a Terrestrial Dragon. The Celestial Dragons of the old Sanada Ten Braves had come to this land, but that did not change how he was born. Celestial Dragons were noble spirits born from the world itself, while Terrestrial Dragons were beasts with a father and mother.

As a beast, he was not a god and not a human. He did not need to follow the human practices of courtesy and reason. He was merely an old and experienced Terrestrial Dragon. He had no one to teach like the Celestial Dragons of the Ten Braves did. And that was why...

"As part of Sanada's Nobushige Faction...I am here to investigate your strength in a mock battle!"

He sought a direct collision with the defense barriers protecting Musashino's bridge below him.

"Musashi" saw a series of shattering lights falling toward Musashino's bridge.

Those defense barriers were set up for stopping a collision from a ship. There were enough of them to stop one of Hashiba's transport ship shells.

And yet every last one of them was destroyed in an instant.

Torahide crashed right through the barriers without trying to avoid them.

The sounds of destruction continued without end and light filled the sky above Musashino.

...Is that...?

“That Terrestrial Dragon is smaller than the average displacement of a Dragon-class, so how can he continue to break the defense barriers? Over.”

“Torahide is somewhat special even for a Lindwurm.”

“Why not just come out and say what you want to say? Over.”

“Well, Sasuke – oh, and I mean the dragon one – only told me after the fact, but most Terrestrial Dragons apparently had their species modified up in heaven. ...If what Torahide was bragging about is true, his ancestors were dropped from satellite orbit onto surface bases as the vanguard for conquering a planet.” Sakai looked to the light of the shattering barriers in the sky. “Look, the Lindwurms have serpentine bodies. Their joints run in a straight line from head to tail and they’ve been reinforced, so any shock entering from the horn on the front of their head will pass right through them and leave through their tail. ...A transport ship is a metal balloon surrounded by a frame, but Torahide is more like a spear made of metal bones. The transport ship hits with a surface while the spear pierces with a point, so you probably can’t hope to stop him with defense barriers designed to stop a transport ship.”

“You heard him, ‘Musashino’. Over.”

“ ‘Musashi’-sama!? Are you really passing this off to me *now*!? Over.”

“Musashino” complained just as the light above Musashino’s bridge came to a stop.

The defense barriers had all been broken.

They quickly tried to open more of them further down, but it was too late. Only a handful appeared in time.

But Torahide had energy to spare and he used it on that inadequate protection. He launched acceleration light from his thrusters, and...

“—————!”

The dragon did not hold back as he fell.

He opened his mouth to fire a dragon cannon at Musashino's bridge-shaped ship's bridge.

“Oh, dear.” Sakai spread his mouth horizontally. “You need to look forward, Torahide, not down.”

Torahide was hit by a small attack from the front.

...*Huh!?*

He was falling at high speed and he was just about to fire a dragon cannon, but an enemy had charged in from the direction of Takao.

Ridiculous, he thought. *Clashing with a high-speed flying object like me is suicide*. He was already surrounded by a shockwave, so anything he touched would be smashed on contact.

And yet the enemy...

...*Where are you aiming!?*

He had just one weak point during his straight-line fall.

It was not the reverse scales on his throat. Attacking there would not affect his solidified straight-line skeleton. But that very structure introduced another weak point.

“...Are you aiming for it!?”

Torahide saw something fly in from directly ahead of him.

It was a vermilion god of war. The heavily-equipped form had a launch-reinforcement frame attached and it was definitely aiming for that weak point.

“The ultimate legend of Takao's derrick...!” shouted the girl on the god of war's shoulder as she smiled at him.

A moment later, the god of war's right knee and external frame collided with his weak point.

That weak point was his back end as he dropped straight down. It was the end of his pointed tail which existed far behind his head.

But it was not the very tip.

It was the side just a bit further forward from the tip.

“Well done...!”

The shockwave surrounding Torahide broke the god of war.

The outstretched right knee split as if struck, the external frame shattered, and it was blown away, starting from the joints.

But within the disturbed air current...

“Ohh...!!”

A girl with a prosthetic right arm spun the god of war around.

The god of war used the wings on its back to swing its entire body around to launch a left spinning back kick.

That was the real attack.

She had let the right knee collide first so its scattered pieces would disturb the air current and rupture Torahide’s shockwave. And once inside...

“Hey, corrupt merchant...!”

“Thank you for your purchase!”

With a carefree voice, ether took a certain shape as it surrounded the god of war’s right heel.

It was a fox. A white fox that breathed wind. It protected the god of war’s right leg while further accelerating it.

The leg continued on and hit.

The fox surrounding the god of war leg shattered and the ether fragments took the form of many, many coins.

Then the god of war’s right leg also broke during its follow-through motion.

The entire god of war cut by in front of Torahide's tail.

"Kh...!"

It was blown away by the shockwave and the shockwave's side effects.

But it had gotten its hit in.

"How about that...!?" shouted the prosthetic-armed girl on the shoulder of the god of war that had lost both legs and half of its right arm. "You're going for a collision with all your weight focused on the front end, so we went for a light attack on your back end. ...It wasn't much force, but the principle of leverage will still move your front end!"

Torahide sensed the result of the enemy's attack.

...You can pull that off just above the surface!?

Due to his speed and his weight at the front end, his charge could deflect any attack from straight ahead or at his front surface. But the back end was different.

Due to his balance, leverage would take effect with his neck as the fulcrum, his head as the point of action, and the tip of his tail as the leverage point.

There was about 100m from the fulcrum to the leverage point. His head was 20m long, so if the tip of his tail was moved, his head would only move one-fifth as much.

The enemy had just knocked his tail toward Musashino's bridge.

It had been a small attack.

But of course, slight movements like that were dangerous during such a high-speed fall.

"...Well done!"

After all, he had just destroyed all of the defense barriers and begun reaccelerating.

He could not make any corrections then.

And his head had been redirected. The ram at the end was shifted to aft instead of aiming straight down.

Any corrections he might make would not be quick enough. He would collide with the bridge before he could correct his angle.

The few barriers that had opened in time had predicted this. They were positioned to catch the diagonally-diverted ram, knock it aside, and allow it to slide along the bridge's upper armor.

In that case, his jaw would hit the edge of the bridge. Due to the momentum of his fall, that would destroy the bridge to an extent, but the shock would not leave him properly and his body would be severed from the neck down.

That would be meaningless.

So he took action.

"...I was careless!"

To avoid Musashino's bridge, Torahide breathed his dragon cannon. And instead of in a straight line, he let the blast disperse so it would stop him.

He released it.

Futayo saw the scene as she raced across the towing belt from Okutama's port bow to Musashino.

The falling dragon turned his face a bit in her direction and breathed explosive light.

...Is that...?

This was her first time seeing a definite dragon cannon.

"I never thought I would get to see such a massive and destructive attack here...!"

Musashino's bridge was a bit in the way, but that was unavoidable since it was about to be destroyed from a direct hit. *The destruction of Musashino's bridge is going to cause a lot of trouble, but there is no way I can make it in time from here.*

In that case, she simply had to make sure she was watching the final moments of the bridge.

“I could learn something...!”

She used a three-step to stop herself on the towing belt and she raised Tonbo Spare.

...Now, bring on the destruction of Musashino’s bridge!!

Just as she gave an excited snort, she heard something behind her.

“Ah, Gin!?”

Muneshige cried out and something crashed into her back.

Futayo looked back to see Gin who had apparently been running after her.

With a “wah” or an “ah”, their visions spun around together.

“...Oh.”

An explosion soon followed.

The dragon cannon blast had erupted near Musashino’s bridge.

Suzu covered her ears.

When she pressed down on Noise Neighbor, the pressure sensor controller detected the action and cut off all sound. But even when she did that, ducked down, and tensed...

“Wah...”

The sound reached her ears through her nose and mouth. The dragon’s roar reached her body by shaking her skin, her densely-packed organs, and the empty space between.

And that told her...

“This is...dangerous...!”

Musashino’s bridge was hit. The attack had been meant to alter the dragon’s course, but it hit the bridge as a wide-area impact. It did not completely destroy the bridge, but the surface armor and most of the windows and frames shook

and were probably torn apart or snapped inside.

But even with her ears covered, Suzu sensed *something*.

That *something* was a figure standing atop the bridge:

“Neshinbara-kun...!?”

<The dragon’s roar spread out over a wide area.>

<But that scattering power was not the dragon’s intention.>

<Would a dragon do to others what is in defiance of its own will?> <There is but one answer: nay.>

<Thus the roar is heard. It is heard in the night sky. It provides only the response the dragon sought and the rest is erased.> <All that remains in the sky is the dragon’s roar, the dragon on its altered course, and...> <“There is nothing more. You may rest easy.”>

When Neshinbara looked up into the sky from atop Musashino’s bridge, there was nothing there.

Only the moons floating in the evening sky and...

“What a pain.”

He removed his hands from the sign frame for Mountains of Words, lightly raised them, and spoke.

“To think I would find myself fighting a dragon in the skies of Sanada. ...This is excellent material.”

A deafening crash sounded from below.

After having his course changed and being blown away by Mountains of Words, Torahide had fallen into Musashino’s central city.

Novice: “How about that? It might be slow to activate, but do you see now how useful my spell is at times like this?”

Worshiper: “I’ll admit it’s impressive...but didn’t the dragon just fall with a

great crash?”

Novice: “Eh?”

Asama: “Um, Neshinbara-kun? You just dropped that dragon into the center of Musashino’s surface city, didn’t you?”

Novice: “Eh!? Huh? Wasn’t that what we had planned? Crossdressing Honda-kun!”

Vice President: “That’s news to me.”

Me: “Hey, some wreckage just flew into my house’s backyard. Will my sis and I be okay playing porn games here?”

Silver Wolf: “Eh!? I-if it’s the same one as before, y-you can continue if you want.”

Laborer: “It looks like I have a lot more work to do...but how are things there?”

...Th-this stupid girl...!!

Gin realized how careless she had been as she tumbled along the towing belt with the stupid girl.

The Musashi Vice Chancellor had been running ahead of her, but her actions were nigh impossible to predict. Gin should have known to keep a greater physical distance from her, but...

“I grew careless and rear-ended her!”

Her mistake had been testing out her own acceleration spell.

It was called Racing Words.

Its effect as an acceleration spell was clear.

...It locks onto your opponent and seeks the coordinates leading to them...

She had taken the idea from the guidance of Kamenuki which Muneshige had borrowed from Sakai, but the acceleration portion would accumulate her own speed.

She had constructed it as a backup in case Muneshige lost Kamenuki on the battlefield and she had been testing it out herself. Of course, when using it herself, she primarily focused on keeping up with Muneshige's Racing Toes acceleration spell. She had learned her lesson after failing to keep up with Oichi's movements during the Battle of Novgorod, so she had tasked herself with following Honda Futayo and begun pursuit.

...But I got too excited when Master Muneshige complimented my speed.

I, Tachibana Gin, have learned my lesson.

After rolling seven times, she forcibly spread her false arms and slammed her palms against the gravity floor of the towing belt. That impact slowed her down enough that her face pitched forward and pressed into something.

It was a butt.

Futayo collapsed forward with her butt sticking into the air.

"Hitting a warrior with your butt...?"

How rude can you be? she wondered, but then Muneshige caught up to them.

"Gin! In a rear-end collision, the person in the back is at fault. You need to apologize."

"Uuh..."

Gin knew he was right, but she could not bring herself to say it.

So she looked back, and...

...Whose side are you on, Master Muneshige!?

She so wanted to say that, but she stopped herself because he had done nothing wrong. Futayo had not hit Gin with her butt; Gin had run into Futayo's butt.

So Gin got up and faced forward.

She saw a butt.

Even as a girl, Gin could tell it was tight and yet nicely plump. It was the unique shape of a runner. Futayo was taller than Gin and her overall amount of flesh was different as well.

This butt and Master Muneshige at Mikawa... she thought as the number “fifty times” flashed in her mind. She considered using her twin swords to take revenge, but she took a deep breath instead. And...

“I am very sorry. I was not looking where I was going.”

Then the other girl moved.

The butt and the rest of her body stretched out like an inchworm so she was lying face down and then she rolled to the side and got up. That was a method used to avoid further attacks.

And then she realized who it was.

“Oh? Gin-dono and Muneshige-dono, you were behind me?”

“Judge,” replied Muneshige while kneeling in front of Futayo. “Musashi Vice Chancellor, even if it was due to her carelessness, you ended up shoving your butt in my aide’s face. It seems you did not particularly notice, but please be more considerate.”

...Master Muneshige!?

“Y-you don’t have to do that, Master Muneshige! I can bear with a butt or two to the face if I have to! You don’t need to go out of your way to ask her for-...”

“Gin. You bear the Tachibana name.”

“—————”

Gin was rendered speechless.

And she realized she had been looking at this on too personal a level. So she sharpened her gaze and turned back toward Futayo. And Futayo...

“Yes. ...Sorry about that.”

She readily apologized, so Gin was rendered speechless once more.

...Uuh.

This made Gin feel so childish.

She was trapped between Muneshige’s welcome presence and Honda Futayo’s excessive honesty, so...

“...Let’s go.”

She stood up.

No one asked where to. They all knew the answer.

They could hear the noise. It was not just one noise and it was far from quiet.

The city was being destroyed and the giant beast’s roar echoed from Musashino.

So Gin spoke.

“Musashi Vice Chancellor, you take the lead. ...We will follow you.”

Musashino had become a night cage.

Some student dorm wide blocks formed the center. Among them, an area four wide blocks long and four wide blocks wide had collapsed under Torahide and formed walls around him.

They were fortunate that “Musahino” had sent out an evacuation warning and that most of the students had been in Okutama to prepare for the school events. Most of the residents had completed a quick evacuation and those in the underground levels had been evacuated to at least the fourth level down.

The rubble piled up in the center area had no artificial light to illuminate the night. There was only the dragon with ether light wafting out from the thrusters across his body.

That flying serpentine dragon was 120m long. He had a ram on his head and two front legs.

He was slowly turning around to face Musashino’s bridge.

Torahide had used most of the ether inside his body to accelerate his descent and for the scattered dragon cannon, so he could not yet fire a dragon cannon that could target the bridge from this range.

And...

“Fire...!”

Tama and Murayama, the second port and starboard ships, ascended.

There were god of war units on the Musashino-side edge.

“Dammit! First Shirasagi and now a dragon!? The furies must be happy!”

“N-no! Do you have any idea how angry I am that I have to kill a dragon!? Uuh...sob, sob.”

“Don’t cry...! The MILF lovers made it through the Shirasagi battle, so you can get through this.”

With their own individual thoughts on the matter, they opened fire from the left and right.

The rapid-fire blasts formed rows of shells that raced toward Torahide. The impacts produced sparks, but...

“They aren’t reaching him...!?”

The shells were deflected just before hitting Torahide.

The shells burst into sparks before arriving at their target.

They all continued firing while amplifying the sensitivity of their sight devices. Then they saw something in the night.

“Are those defense barriers!?”

No.

All of his thrusters were opened and emitting light.

This was not the side effect of post-acceleration ether like before. He was protected by...

“The awe of a dragon!?”

Hori-ko: “I am watching from Tama, but how does that work?”

Novice: “Oh, you don’t know, Ariadust-kun!? Well, you see-...!”

Sticky King: “It is one of his special abilities as a nonhuman.”

Obscene: “Indeed! Just as we can change form, dragons have their own

special abilities. And dragons in particular are known for having multiple such abilities!”

Uqui: “A dragon’s awe effect is, well...you know that thing I do when I blow out my ether charge as a radiating dragon cannon? It is that but as a constant thing. It is not often a Terrestrial Dragon can do it, but that Torahide must be at a high enough position.”

Hori-ko: “Judge. Then how do you break through that awe?”

Novice: “We’ve skipped over quite a lot, but I have measures in place for this. And they should kick in any time now.”

Hori-ko: “I see. ...Then begin.”

Everyone on the Musashi noticed a momentary pause.

Torahide was crouched low and emitting his awe while gradually building up ether inside his body.

The god of war firing units were holding him down by continuing to fire despite knowing it would not get through.

A slight pause occurred between the two sides.

It was caused by Torahide taking a breath, the god of war units swapping out magazines, and the second port and starboard ships ending their ascent.

And just after everything came to a brief stop, the next action occurred.

“———!?”

The giant form stuck his arms forward and bent backwards.

That was not normal behavior. It was an action of rejection, meant to forcefully avoid something below him.

“Huh?” said everyone on the surface, including the gods of war, as they tilted their heads forward.

They saw a light beyond the wind created by Torahide’s action.

Something reflected the moonlight as it stabbed into Torahide’s throat where

it had been lowered a bit before.

“Is that...?”

It was Excalibur.

It pierced the reverse scales of the dragon’s throat. As Torahide bent backwards, it revealed where the glowing blade’s wielder had to be.

“Underground...!?”

There was an opening on the ground where his throat had been.

The hole was for the lift in the center of the long block. And someone rose from the depths of that hole.

“Oh, dear.”

A golden color danced in the wind in front of the giant form.

It was Mary.

That English princess ignored the dragon as she looked left and right.

She gave a quick bow to the gods of war to port and starboard.

“Everyone, thank you for your hard work tonight.”

As Mary said that, the lift came to a stop.

Now that she was on the surface, Torahide’s fangs snapped together over her head. He had launched an attack on the person who had driven a blade into his reverse scales.

But he could not bring his head low enough with the blade in this throat.

Mary seemed to know that as she looked up at him.

She showed no fear of the great dragon and spoke quietly but clearly.

“If you will calm down, I will remove Excalibur.”

But...

“If you will not calm down, Excalibur will be removed.”

“Huh...!?”

Torahide had no idea what she meant and he moved his pair of front legs.

While leaning back, he swung his head and left leg.

He tried to swipe at Mary with the shell and claws of that 15m front leg.

It was a brute force attack, but something flew in toward him before it could hit.

It was a blue mass of metal.

It was a round mobile shell.

A chain was wrapped around the tail ballast. The chain extended to the edge of Murayama, where...

“Here we go, Adele!!”

The silver wolf’s high-speed swing threw Adele’s Raging Beast like a hammer and she flew right toward Torahide’s exposed reverse scales.

The flying mobile shell passed through the white of a water vapor explosion, and...

“Here I gooooo!!”

Raging Beast seemed pushed on by the reverberating howling and barking of dogs from across Musashi.

It only took an instant to hit.

She had been aimed for Torahide’s reverse scales, but...

“Excalibur! In you goooo!”

Adele used her arms to adjust her position in midair and collided with Excalibur like a hammer into a nail.

Suzu heard a dragon’s roar of pain for the very first time.

...Wow...

It was not the cry that surprised her.

It was the fact that the dragon had reflexively roared in pain.

“He immediately...reacted...to the pain?”

Suzu thought, *Humans don't scream from the pain.*

Humans screamed once they realized what had happened to them or figured out what was about to happen to them.

Pain was no more than one of the triggers to help them realize that and they would not scream until they noticed if they received a painless injury.

So a human's scream was related to future anxiety or sorrow. You could say they had already accepted that future by the time they screamed.

But this dragon was different. According to “Musashino” next to her...

“Judge. A human will scream or cry out once they understand the injury. Thus, they can hold it in if they are sufficiently mentally prepared.”

She was not done speaking, so there was no “over”.

But “Musashino” created a “pause” to help her understand, so Suzu nodded.

“That is...true...isn't it?”

When she stubbed her little toe on the support pillar for her home's loft, she would curl up silently. That restraint came from a sort of mental preparedness and experience. It came from the knowledge that you could bear with “this much” damage.

But...

“With creatures as large as dragons, it can take a long time to notice an injury. They have many blind spots, such as their tails. And for a wild animal, not realizing their state until they notice the injury can be fatal.”

So...

“Most dragons have a sub-brain that sends a reaction back to the appropriate part of their body the instant they take damage. Their body reacts to the pain before their mind. That was the reaction you saw to this attack. Of course, this is an intelligent dragon. He too can restrain himself with enough mental preparedness, but...”

Suzu sensed what was happening on Musashino: After colliding with the

dragon, Adele was instantly pulled away when Mitotsudaira swung the silver chain in the opposite direction.

And Suzu realized something else about Adele's mobile shell.

...She's pulling it out!?

The machine's arm was holding Excalibur.

Upon leaving, she had forcibly pulled the sword out.

The dragon roared in pain again and "Musashino" spoke calmly.

"Generally, large dragons are not prepared to be injured by anything as small as a human. Over."

Torahide realized he was bleeding from the wound to his reverse scales.

Ether surrounded his blood which gathered inside his shell and spurted out like a pump from the movements of his muscles.

"Kh...!"

It began like a geyser, but it eventually grew to a waterfall and then swiftly coagulated to stop the bleeding. It took 12 seconds in all.

That was only the span of a single breath for a dragon. But in that time...

"Damn you all...!"

He fired 70% of his accumulated ether from deep in his throat as a dragon cannon.

But he did not aim at Musashino's bridge or at the surrounding gods of war.

He fired at the ground below him.

The floor of Musahino's crushed surface city was exposed.

The city was constructed from packaged structures, so it had poor defense. So...

"Even if I cannot bring down the bridge, I still win if I pierce through the entire ship!"

Torahide fired the dragon cannon.

He had a single target: the English princess who still stood below him.

She looked up at him with a hand on her cheek as the powerful ether light crashed into her.

It took two moments and one moment.

The first to arrive was a single voice:

“Bind...Tonbo Spare!”

It was Futayo.

She was running at full speed.

A path had been made from the port side of Musashino’s stern to here so she did not have to slow Soaring Wings’s speed.

The automatons and evacuated students had opened all the doors, placed boards across any height differences or holes, and otherwise created a nearly straight path.

Her arrival was slightly later than planned due to the rear-end collision with the Tachibana Couple, but...

“Get going, Vice Chancellor!”

“You can ignore the ninja who’s probably around there somewhere! But save Mary-sama!”

“Ponytails are the best!!”

Futayo answered everyone’s cheers with speed. She did not let Soaring Wings shatter as she followed the straight line path.

“...!”

And she made a cut from straight ahead.

Torahide saw his dragon cannon split in two.

...So a dragonfly can cut a dragon's power!

The vertical blast had been bisected.

The light split into two distinct blasts and the power was cut apart. The dragon cannon was split to either side of the English princess.

But...

"This is still enough!" Torahide shouted from high enough to call the sky. "It just means the damage occurs in two places!!"

But Torahide saw a man run up from behind Musashi's Vice Chancellor.

...Is that...?

Torahide of course knew the name of the Peerless in the West. But he had heard rumors from the west that the boy had lost his inherited name. And that he was training at Musashi.

According to Torahide's comrades who had gone to Novgorod, the Peerless in the West's current weapon was...

...Kamenuki!

That quasi-divine weapon pursued and approached its target.

He was probably using that power to follow after Musashi's Vice Chancellor.

But, thought Torahide. *How can he oppose a dragon cannon with Kamenuki?*

He saw the answer.

The Peerless in the West took a certain action: He caught Kamenuki's shaft on his shoulder and spun it.

While the spear with a longish blade was rotating, he raised his free hand over his head.

A line of something flew over.

The object had formed a horizontal wave as it was pulled back and flew in from behind the Peerless in the West.

The curved horizontal line was a chain.

It was one of the silver chains.

The chain was being pulled from starboard Tama and toward Murayama, so there was a height difference.

Torahide realized Tama had grown quite low at some point.

...What is this?

Before he caught on or figured it out, the silver chain grew taut. The pulling acceleration had reached its max and it formed a straight line from Tama to Murayama.

And then something flew into the Peerless in the West's hand.

Torahide had never seen the weapon before, but he knew its name:

"Lype Katathlipse!"

"It is known as the Muneshige Cannon now. However..."

The Peerless in the West used his legs to stop himself while he raised the blade to the side and cried out.

"Bind... Lype Katathlipse!!"

Chapter 40: Soarer on the Musical Stage

第四十章

『奏でる舞台の舞い上がり屋』



それは
狭くあり
広くあるもの
配点 (戦場)

What is

Both narrow

And wide?

Point Allocation (Battlefield)

Torahide's dragon cannon was split into a total of four parts.

A moment later, defense barriers appeared in the path of each section.

That meant this had been predicted. However, the dozens of barriers were smashed in an instant and the dragon cannon tore into the ground.

The somewhat-diagonal beam of light made a horizontal sweep that crushed the floor materials and burst the pipes for ether fuel and water. The internal pressure caused the contents to burst out and instantly turned the Musashino into a battlefield filled with glowing smoke and steam.

But the dragon cannon had still been weakened. A direct hit would have made it deep underground, but...

"The damage was restricted to only the second wide block's second underground level. Over."

Everyone cheered at that report from "Musashino".

Of course, the battle was not over.

They had defended against Torahide's attack, but he was nearly unharmed. His coagulated blood had closed up the wound in his reverse scales, so he lowered down once more. And this time...

"I will destroy you...!"

Still standing, the Lindwurm threw a right strike toward the unmoving English princess.

As soon as he did, he realized his desire to "destroy" had been granted to an extent.

His left leg was supporting his body, but the floor directly below it suddenly

broke through.

Thanks to that destruction, his leg fell through the floor from the elbow to the shoulder.

“...It broke!?”

Torahide collapsed onto his left side.

“The rushed evacuation and the ‘removal’ pitfall seem to have worked well.”

On Musashino’s sixth underground level, the dragon’s hand had broken through the wide block’s ceiling and fallen right in front of Urquiaga. It looked like a lizard’s, but the palm alone was about seven meters.

However, Urquiaga nodded to Noriki who stood by his side.

“Commence arrest...!”

“Judge...!”

People involved in construction and repairs aboard the Musashi were waiting on each floor of the wide block. They used the light gods of war stored in the underground wide block to place chains around the dragon’s arm and quickly bind it in place.

Each individual one was weak, but with them all working together, hundreds of chains wrapped around the same dragon arm and attached it to Musashino’s underground frame. The last few did not make it in time, but...

“The dragon is moving!”

A powerful tug suddenly arrived.

Up on Musashino’s surface, Torahide realized he had been captured.

...This...!

Was it a sign of inexperience to finish that thought with “cannot be”?

His left arm was buried in Musashino’s floor up to the elbow.

And that arm had clearly been *allowed* to stick that far down. The material he

had broken through had not been as hard or reactive as the rest of the floor.

But even with a dragon's arm and muscle strength, it was difficult to pull his arm out of the floor when it had sunk down up to the shoulder. After all, that required lifting his body straight up, but a dragon's arms were attached on the left and right side on the bottom of a body with an elliptical cross-section. With that bodily structure, it was nearly impossible to pull his arm straight up.

Since his right arm was free, his only option was to place that on the floor and arch his body backwards. However...

...I'll be in trouble if my right arm breaks through as well!

Thus, Torahide bent his right elbow and pushed his forearm against the floor.

The larger the contact area, the less likely it was to break through the floor. On top of that, he decided to bend his body back more than push with his arm, but...

"...!"

Torahide emitted his awe to ensure his safety.

A moment later, he heard several shell hits. But the attacks did not affect him.

The countless hits scattered sparks and were negated before reaching his body. So...

...Calm down.

If he rushed this, he would fall into some kind of trap.

This was enemy territory. And most likely, the enemy was executing a plan for battling a dragon.

He knew why they would have one: Sasuke and Saizou had greeted them the day before.

That was partially due to common courtesy and the Celestial Dragons' pride, but as a Terrestrial Dragon acting as a scout, putting the enemy on guard only made his job harder. However...

"A Terrestrial Dragon completes the task assigned to him...!"

The Celestial Dragons had gone to a certain location for the future of Sanada.

Sanada's main force would eventually abandon this land and head to Osaka.
And the dragons...

...We have lived for too long...!

Torahide thought, *Even among nonhuman lifeforms, dragons are especially long-lived.*

But they still had a lifespan. Dragons considered a thousand years to be a full life and he had already lived for more than eight hundred years.

He still had more than a hundred years, but he was admittedly very old.

He doubted he would survive the decisive battle between the east and the west that would occur at Osaka.

After all, they had received information on modern warfare from the Ten Braves who had taken over after them and from the dragons remaining in Hexagone Française and the rest of Europe.

The Germanic age of their youth had ended.

Large organized armies and aerial ships now ruled the battlefield and the humans had a powerful king.

He liked the sound of going out in a blaze of glory in a brief showdown with an enemy like that.

He also liked the sound of spending his final moments racing across the battlefield with his companions.

But, he thought.

He had suffered a defeat about four hundred years ago and come to this land. He had followed the corps commander and the others who had left Europe for their own reasons and he had sought reconciliation with the people.

A lot had happened, but the people of the land had accepted them.

“————”

The existence of Sanada was praised in the Testament and a messenger from the Testament Union had asked them to take inherited names.

The messenger had said that, according to a note in the Testament, they would approach within a step of ruling the Far East on the upcoming battlefield.

They had accepted on the condition that their leader kept the existence of the dragons a secret.

His body was beginning to show its age.

The corps commander had not wanted to leave any of the local people with a destiny forcing them to make such a desperate charge.

He and the others have grown old too, honestly thought Torahide.

The people had been considerate, but the corps commander and the others had not given up those inherited names and had instead given the people inherited names that would not die in that battle and could live on.

However, time had passed and even Celestial Dragons had lifespans.

After living for more than eight hundred years, the Celestial Dragons were dying and their numbers were in decline.

The Terrestrial Dragons like Torahide were the same.

They had lost so many of their own kind and they were in the local people's debt in so many ways.

On the other hand, Torahide had been a scout back when he was young and he was still doing that now.

That had not changed.

But I am old, he thought. *In the past, a scout would stick to reconnaissance, avoid battle, and finish any unavoidable battle as soon as possible to return alive.*

So what is this now? Yes.

"A dragon's pride..."

The Celestial Dragons had left. The young fighters of the current generation would head out next.

An aged member of the old generation should stand aside for them. But...

“Once I have stood aside, I cannot bear to stand idly by while the enemy arrives in the land they leave behind!!”

Torahide forcibly pulled his left arm out.

Unseen below the ground, his fingers were splayed out and his arm was bound by hundreds of chains. However...

“...!”

He raised a roar and worked at breaking all that bound him.

Once was not enough. Nor was twice or thrice. He had to work over and over again.

Urquiaga saw it from the sixth underground level.

The giant dragon’s left hand repeatedly tried to pull up and his three bound fingers tried to grab at the chains.

The dragon’s hand contained plenty of power, but Urquiaga could see the heat leaking from the heat radiation slits on his wrist and elsewhere.

And each time the chains strained...

Bell: “Urquia...ga-kun? There’s a bit...of an alarm on Musa...shino.”

Uqui: “Yes, I can hear it. Sign frames have been opening, too. They say ‘danger’, but is it that bad?”

Musashino: “To be blunt, my main body is bending quite a bit. Over.”

“Just wait,” said Urquiaga without worrying about it.

He looked to the side where two people approached with light steps. One was Narumi and the other...

“Teacher Oriotorai, what should we do at times like this? I would like a quick lesson.”

“Well.” She munched on the skewered croquettes she had in a paper bag. “This is a mock battle, right? I can’t really support one side over the other.”

Musashino: “Um, Oriotorai-sama? This is quite dangerous. Over.”

“That’s what the landlady’s saying, huh?”

Urquiaga saw Narumi giving Oriotorai a look of utter disbelief, but...

...Was there anything all that odd about this teacher’s reaction?

Narumi must be sensitive, concluded Urquiaga.

And that was when the continually-attacking dragon’s large arm vibrated up and down.

83: “The third underground level is now free.”

The arm could move up and down a bit without being lifted.

“He can build up a reaction now, so it won’t take much longer.”

Urquiaga pointed to the dragon’s hand. He then noticed a dog that had approached either to beg for Oriotorai’s food or for comfort.

“That’s one of the dogs that’s always hanging around Adele,” said Noriki.

“Do we smell like Adele maybe?” wondered Oriotorai. “And, Urquiaga, what’s that for? Does something interest you about the dragon’s chicken wing...no, I mean hand?”

“Judge,” he replied before pointing at the dog walking over to Oriotorai’s feet. “Some healing is in order, you see. But first I would like to ask something. Answer me this, Teacher Oriotorai.”

He asked his question.

“Is *that* the same as *that*?”

Suzu heard a deafening noise.

“Musashino” suddenly stopped moving while serving tea next to her.

“Has Torahide-sama gotten his arm out? Over.”

“ ‘Musashino’-san...are you...mad?”

“No, not really. But...I feel like I was ignored for an awfully long time. Over.”

She turned to face the bow. Suzu knew there was a large sign frame there,

but she could not see what it showed.

However, the sounds she heard were enough to understand the situation.

The dragon had stood up in the center of Musashino.

That giant dragon had several chains wrapped around its left foreleg. And it was raising its head.

“...!!”

It roared into the night sky.

...Wow.

It was an overwhelming voice. The great roar sent vibrations through the bridge. But Suzu...

“Huh?”

She felt like she had heard this before. Where was it?

Unturning: “What an unpleasant roar.”

She had indeed heard it before.

Unturning: “That is the rage-filled voice of someone with nowhere to go. Just like the Seiryu.”

Torahide took action as soon as he stood up.

He had pulled his arm out by bending backwards, but since he was supporting himself with his right arm, he mostly bent to the upper left.

That was convenient for him. After all, he could use that movement to swing his left leg to the right.

And that allowed him to swipe at the person who had been standing there: “The English princess...!”

He swept a high-speed attack toward her location.

A human was essentially weightless when faced with a dragon’s full speed and weight.

Due to the momentum, she would not be thrown by the impact. She would simply burst upon impact like a water balloon.

It was night, so he could not see the situation clearly.

He swept his left arm across and held his left hand up toward the moons.

It only took an instant.

His bestial palm was illuminated by the moonlight and the ether light of his own awe. It was coated with something dark red.

He knew it was blood, and a lot of it.

“...”

He felt an odd sensation that could only be described as “finally”.

In the Warring States period, it seemed wrong for a scout to take the first kill. However...

...Corps commander...

And the other Celestial Dragons too.

“This is all they were...”

They had prepared a foolish decoy to draw his attack while they executed their tactic.

But they had ultimately lost to the dragon’s power and lost their valuable decoy. And as a result...

“Ohh...”

He heard several voices of surprise. From the god of war units and the warriors.

“Look! ...Mary-sama is waving at us!”

Torahide heard the voices from Murayama to port.

“Ohhhh! You’re right! Her majesty as a princess is so obvious at night!”

“I-is she waving at me!?”

“Wait! That ninja might be somewhere around here! Search for him!”

...What!?

The English princess was alive.

To confirm that, Torahide raised his left hand again and looked beyond it.

There she was.

He saw blonde hair and a summer uniform that combined the Far Eastern and English designs.

It was English Princess Mary Stuart. She was unharmed and she had not changed position. She was simply glowing and waving to port while her hair fluttered in the wind of his awe.

What was this?

Torahide looked to his left hand raised toward the moons. That bestial hand was wet with blood. But...

“It can’t be...”

There was something odd about the moonlit beast’s hand.

Its three claws had been half severed and it was bleeding.

He was injured.

...How!?

Torahide knew a dragon’s reflexes should sensitively detect and respond to any damage. Was there any reason that would fail to activate?

“—————”

There was.

Faint light surrounded his raised claws.

It was a Holy Spell healing spell. And it was an anesthetic variety that eliminated pain instead of simply healing.

“Unlike human nails, an animal’s claws have nerves running through them,”

explained Urquiaga while listening to the roar arriving through the large hole in the ceiling. He was looking at the puppy playfully chasing Oriotorai as she took slow steps. “And those are not simple nerve endings; they have a certain level of circulation. Thus, an animal will lose any feeling in its claws if they are cut off at the base. But that also causes intense pain, so it was necessary to first cast an anesthetic spell on the dragon so he would not notice.”

The half-dragon raised a charm and saw Narumi store her mandible sword in empty air.

There was a pool of dark red blood on the floor and it was already starting to congeal.

“It’s only from a Terrestrial Dragon, but this will make an excellent material for strengthening metals. There is a reason even Date uses this in the higher-level processing of Orei Metallo.”

Urquiaga stared at it and ignored the vibrations and noise from above.

“I never thought I would get to enjoy this kind of outdoor hunting on the Musashi. A study camp is a surprisingly worthwhile experience. What do you think, Narumi?”

“We already did something similar at Sendai Castle, so I’m kind of sick of it.”

“These two...” muttered Noriki before looking up at the distant rumbling and asking a question. “What happens now that you’ve cut the dragon’s claws and nerves?”

“Well, he will of course lose any feeling in his fingers, so he will be unable to grab and aim properly. From a dragon’s perspective, targeting something as small as a human will not be easy. The anesthetic spell will also eliminate some feeling, but we actually severed his nervous system’s circulation. Even if he stops the bleeding with a healing spell, it will take some time for the circulation to be reformed.”

Meaning...

“He will be unable to attack properly with his left hand for a while.”

Torahide realized he could not support himself with his left arm.

His claws would not dig in.

That was partially due to the Musashi's flat surface and it was partially due to his shortened claws, but...

...I've lost all feeling in them!

He could of course move his fingers, but he could not feel the reactive force.

He only felt a vague sensation from half of his hand, like he had a fever. The bleeding was stopping, but that meant he was losing the sensation of his pulse in the end of the severed claws.

The Holy Spell on his claws was also a problem.

That anesthetic spell cut off his sense of pain.

He recognized the light it produced.

It was a spell that had been developed and strengthened by the humans who had been scattered in the wake of the dragons as they swept across Europe eight hundred years ago. The dragons had crushed the humans many times when those humans erased their pain with that spell and returned to the battlefield wearing nothing else.

So it was technically not a healing spell.

It allowed one to continue fighting without healing their wounds.

...Well done...!

The modern teachings tended to say not to waste your life. The corps commander and the others would surely say that nowadays.

But they were dragons. Battle was honor itself.

Whether injured, hurt, or dismembered, ceasing to fight was the same as losing your name's honor.

Thus, this spell had been given to the Unneeded. The Holy Spell had been remade as a local spell, medicines had been added in, and it had been made into a charm that strengthened one's body and cut off all pain. Those charms had been given to them as a last resort. And now, after eight hundred years...

“You would use it on me!?”

Torahide stopped relying on his left arm. He got down on his elbows instead.

He stared straight ahead, at the hair of the English Princess who still stood there.

And he realized she was looking at him.

Why, he wondered just before a straight-line attack arrived from starboard. It was a high-speed charge aimed at his face. And it came from...

“A Satomi god of war...!?”

The exchange only lasted a moment.

Torahide bent his entire body and used that to swing his right arm to the right in a hooked shape.

Satomi Yoshiyasu launched a counterattack on his right hand using the weapon held by Righteousness.

It was a large shield.

A preserving damper had been hastily attached to one of Musashi's external armor panels and it had been roughly curved to reduce air resistance.

347: “That was curved under my grampa's instructions, so it's really accurate!”

Yoshiyasu heard Mishina Hiro's voice over the divine transmission.

347: “Don't hesitate to destroy it!”

That is one hell of an engineering family, thought Yoshiyasu while doing just as suggested.

First, she went beyond decelerating all of her wings and actually opened them in the reverse direction.

More than rapidly brake her, that full burst actually moved her backwards. It did not matter that the wing connections on her back, shoulders, and hips immediately cried out in protest. It would take longer for them to break.

Thus, she changed her forward charge into a rapid retreat, while...

“Take this...!”

She kicked the large shield toward Torahide’s right hand as it flew toward her.

The dragon’s fist shattered it.

It only took an instant.

The shield made from Musashi’s armor burst and scattered like dried leaves.

But the fragments of the center portion were pushed by the dragon’s blow and flew toward Yoshiyasu.

...Bring it on!

Yoshiyasu set her sights on the returning shield fragments.

Her following reaction was not a simple counterattack. She did the same thing Musashi’s Vice Chancellor had the night before.

“A midair leaping evasion...!”

She threw a piercing kick at the fragments with her toes, launching Righteousness in the opposite direction.

She tried to move away from Torahide’s pursuing fist.

But the dragon’s fist extended.

He extended his sharp claws and straightened his elbow to make a piercing jab toward her.

He was going for a finishing blow.

Yoshiyasu felt no fear when she saw that fact with the god of war’s sight devices.

Instead, she gave a mental smile.

...That’s a dragon for you!

Dragons were great. They moved differently from the tentacles of Houjou. They never tried to wrap around you, constrict you, and swing you around.

They came to kill you.

So Yoshiyasu released her wings behind her. She operated the four forward-facing metal panels on her back and released their stored-up pressure in front of her.

This backwards flight caused her entire body to compress.

The approaching dragon's claws revealed their tips and approached close enough to reach her chest.

But she had accelerated enough to match his speed.

The approach seemed to stop and only the background flowed by in this transparent time.

A moment later, Righteousness accelerated somewhat. That gradually increased the distance between them.

"...Come on!"

Immediately after that, the enemy arrived.

He extended his reach.

The dragon extended even his shoulder toward her. That meant the length of one dragon shoulder was added to the reach of the enemy's attack.

...Wonderful!

He was an animal but also an intelligent being. He possessed intelligence and combat ability far exceeding that of humans.

The fact that she was clashing with one brought instantaneous elation to her heart. And more importantly...

"—————"

Their battlefield this time was not enemy territory. It was...

"A place of survival...!"

Yoshiyasu suddenly recalled the past.

Specifically, the times before Mikatagahara.

Back when Satomi was still around, she had had so many comrades in her

coastal hometown and they had worked together to protect their nation.

Their nation had been small, but that had required they work together and they had fought toward the same goal on the battlefield no matter how much conflict there was between them. And that goal had been...

...Protecting our home.

After all, the opposite coast had been enemy territory. The enemy coming from there would quickly reach their territorial waters and arrive at their coastal city.

Thus, they had constantly been fighting with people's homes behind them.

Victory had been a necessity and their duty had been to immediately regain anything that was taken. They had always heard the people's cheers of support behind them and their only reward had been the path home.

They had been proud of that life and they had protected their home.

But they had lost all of that.

Ever since, she had lost that sensation and that opportunity. At Novgorod, she had appeared on the battlefield as an attacker working alongside another nation. Last night, she had entered the sky to protect her comrades and as part of the overall strategy, but it had been too indirectly related to protecting a place where people lived their lives.

But this was different.

She was fighting atop the Musashi. She was directly inside the city.

The enemy was a colossal dragon. And Musashino's city had already been badly damaged.

Plus, this enemy was powerful, unknown, and strong. So...

"Ohh...!"

Yoshiyasu fulfilled her duty. This was her response to the hopes of the people behind her.

...And it is the proof that I have not forgotten what I once gained in Satomi...

That was not all. There was something she herself wanted.

“I...”

Yoshiyasu drew her sword during her high-speed flight.

“I must grow stronger!!”

Everyone on the Musashi saw Torahide’s right hand knocked upwards.

On the row of long blocks to the aft of Musashino, metal sparks flew, Righteousness rapidly braked its backwards glide, and arcs of blood flew from the dragon’s right hand and over the god of war’s head.

And three moonlit objects flew through Murayama’s sky. They were...

“The dragon’s claws...!?”

The god of war unit firing on Musashino looked up to view the 2m amber curves.

They knew what must have happened to those airborne claws.

“Did the Satomi Student Council President sever them during all that?”

In their field of view and at the depths of their sense of hearing, they saw sparks rise from Musashino’s long blocks and heard metal groan from the same area.

Righteousness had landed and finished braking at the end of the starboard side.

Shimmering heat rose from the four wings on its back and vermilion heat was visible within the thrusters.

The motors and joints were the same.

It could no longer move properly without being serviced first. That was clear to everyone watching. Inside it, Yoshiyasu had to be feeling great exhaustion and pain from the feedback.

It had been brief, but she had fought with a monster more than ten times her size. She had achieved something and she had returned alive.

“And I didn’t damage the surface city while landing and braking...”

But Righteousness maintained its fighting stance. She had pulled back the sword and her wrists and she held her elbow forward.

As if in response to that, the others took the next action.

The results of Yoshiyasu's one-girl charge were right in front of them.

Torahide shook his right arm due to the intense pain and he had lost balance.

The dragon's roar seemed to swell out on a path from the moon to the earth.

Immediately afterwards, everyone took action. They acted on Neshinbara's instructions as he stood on top of Musashino's bridge.

"Everyone on Musashino...charge!!"

Murayama and Musashino were now at equal altitudes.

When Torahide's dragon cannon was split into four, they had been brought to the same altitude. From there, they had moved him toward Murayama and...

"We used a transport ship to make a bridge. Pay up and you may cross it...!"

Everyone threw 10-yen coins into the Treasurer's sign frame with all their might and then ran across the ship bridge.

Their destination was the serpentine dragon lying across Musashino. Or more specifically...

"His side...!"

They knew exactly where to aim: 37 locations along his left side. Those were his "axis of balance" that Suzu had deduced from his movements. Asama had then placed target guidance sign frames on those locations.

"Ohh...!"

The god of war unit charged in with assault spears. At the same time, the warriors and the Technohexen unit focused fire on Torahide's left side.

Intense sounds rang out and Torahide's body shook without the support of his right arm.

So they all hit and pushed the dragon even more.

As more impacts and shots hit him from the left, the people pushed at the giant dragon that had destroyed the city.

“Keep pushing...”

They would roll him over to turn his belly to the left and flip him upside down.

They had a single goal.

“Don’t let him fly!”

That giant dragon was a Lindwurm. He was a serpentine flying dragon. He had two wings on his back.

The best way to defeat such a large creature was to prevent him from using his wings. And they knew how to do that: “Flip him over!”

Wild animals expressed submission by exposing their defenseless belly.

So they would force him into that pose. That was Neshinbara and the others’ plan.

But...

“...!!”

Torahide struggled when he realized what they were trying to do.

He opened all his body’s thrusters and triggered a dragon cannon explosion all around him.

It was an awe explosion.

Light burst and a deafening noise sounded. The blast caused Torahide’s body to float up fairly high.

He was launched up to the same height as Musashino’s bridge, or maybe even higher.

The blast had contained such great pressure that it had blown away the assault unit and firing unit from Murayama.

Most of the gods of war were knocked onto their butts or slid backwards along the floor, so everyone was forced to fall back to the city cage surrounding

Torahide.

The warriors and Technohexen were the same. They were pushed back by the awe wind and slammed back-first into the city cage.

“Kh...!”

But then rubble and building fragments flew their way.

“Opening defense barriers! Over.”

“Musashino” ordered a windbreak of defense barriers to be opened around Torahide and they noisily shattered as they protected everyone.

But even if the defense arrived in time, there was one clear inconvenience here.

They had been moved away.

Beyond the space between them, the half-rolled form attempted to roll back while flying high in the sky.

He rolled back to the left, starting with his tail.

He powerfully curled his skinny tail to the left and that twist would propagate up toward his face to revert his body’s orientation.

And just as his giant body seemed to tremble in the night sky...

“...!”

He rolled.

Torahide realized his body had completed its roll.

He had twisted his body, starting from the tail, but that movement had flipped him back around all the way to the head.

It was like the reactive force returning a twisted cloth to normal. He had built up a little too much momentum, but he used a thruster explosion to...

...Gather strength in my body once more!

While rolling and rotating in midair, Torahide saw the enemy.

At the moment, Musashino was surrounded by defense barriers on the left and right. He felt like he was at the bottom of a glowing canyon. Forward was the only path available to him.

Shallow in the sky ahead, he saw Musashino's bridge and the English princess was standing on the ground.

But the dragon eyes located on the sides of his face spotted something in the corner of his vision.

A few figures stood on the port edge of Murayama and the starboard edge of Tama.

...Are those...?

On the starboard edge was Musashi's princess. She wore an apron and her silver hair fluttered in the wind.

On the port edge was a nudist boy. He wore a scarf on his crotch and the white cloth fluttered in the wind.

"A nudist...!?"

Torahide spoke aloud without thinking and only then did he notice something.

The princess's hair was fluttering behind her and a bit above her.

Tama was descending. And that would put it at the same height as Musashino and Murayama.

...Are they going to perform a charge from Tama too!?

Just as he wondered that, two new figures were added.

First, a girl wearing only a sheet stood next to the nudist. Her hair and the edge of the sheet danced in the wind and the curves of her body were visible through the sheet.

"Ah."

She opened her mouth to produce a voice that carried into the distance and provided the tuning to begin a song.

On the opposite side, someone gasped for breath as they arrived next to the

princess.

It was a shrine maiden.

She was out of breath and bent forward, but she held out her hands to reject the bamboo bottle that Musashi's princess offered her.

"Kimi...! Toori-kun!"

Asama shouted to the pair on the opposite side and struck her hands together.

She clapped. And Hanami nodded from her shoulder.

"Clap!"

A moment later, a voice reached her. It was Kimi's voice, singing a powerful arrangement of a certain song.

"Let me pass."

It was the Song of Passage. And Asama saw a light arrive in response.

The light came from the nudist. Countless ether supply lines drew curves as they flew from his back.

...Hurry...!

This was a race against time. Torahide was dropping down from overhead. They had to act faster than that.

...We need to deal with this and protect the Musashi!

She heard a voice.

"If I follow this narrow path, where will it take me?"

The light flying from Toori moved to the gaps between Musashino and Tama and between Musashino and Murayama. On the Murayama side, a transport ship filled the gap like a bridge. On the Tama side, there was simply empty space. The light from the nudist's back shot out in consecutive waves. It was controlled by the two sign frames in front of Asama, which she operated like playing a keyboard.

“Submit...!”

Asama spread the sign frames like wings and her own voice joined the song.

“This narrow path leads to the gods in heaven.”

A moment later, her and Kimi’s dance and song offering received authorization from their gods. It was a joint effort between Asama and Ootsubaki. When selecting the divine protections, Asama mostly went with...

...Toori-kun...!

She requested amplification. The immediately-authorized power quickly doubled the nudist’s supply lines.

And that was not all. Asama exchanged a glance with Horizon. And...

“Your opinion is not needed. You cannot pass through here.”

Horizon’s lips moved to join the song.

There was no sound, so Asama simply nodded her way.

Horizon nodded back and sound left her opened mouth to form a voice.

That voice was a song.

“I have come to celebrate this child’s tenth birthday.”

Asama followed along with Horizon and included her in their song.

She submitted it and requested more. Horizon was registered as a normal person, but the request was approved.

...That means our god has approved of Horizon’s voice.

Her song would reach Musashi’s Asama Shrine every morning and evening. It was possible the god had already heard it.

As a result, all of the light racing through the sky was amplified.

On the other side, his eyebrows rose and he smiled a little. She also saw him give her a quick wave of thanks. She considered waving back, but...

...Th-that was for Horizon, wasn’t it?

Wise Sister: “C’mon, you two. Aren’t you going to respond to my foolish

brother?”

Horizon raised her right thumb, so Asama did the same.

<Notification: That choreography was lame, so I'll lower your Blessings a bit. By, god.> Asama: “Wh-what have I done!? What have I done!?”

Wise Sister: “Just roll with it. So how are we doing, Suzu?”

That question received a definite response.

Bell: “Y-yes. Judge. This should work.”

“This” being...

Bell: “Rapidly lowering Musashino...!”

Falling Torahide was going in for a definite landing.

He would land in the same location atop Musashino.

There was a reason he had twisted around to make such a powerful landing.

He had wanted to provide more of an impact to damage Musashino when he did so.

Musashino's frame had already started to bend when he pulled his left leg out earlier. Dropping his great weight on it now was sure to accomplish something.

And even if not, smashing the surface area would do damage to several blocks.

So he dropped down. Or he intended to.

But just before he did, Musashino suddenly sank down.

...What!?

He was confused because this was not possible.

Musashino had not fallen.

Falling would have been slow to start out with, but this movement was just as fast as his own fall.

“A descent!?”

Then walls of light appeared on either side of him.

Tama and Murayama seemed to rise up on either side of Musashino. A massive amount of ether light was erupting out of those gaps.

As those cascades of light fell upwards, Torahide saw something beyond them.

The gravitational acceleration systems on the inner sides of Tama and Murayama were fully opened.

They were normally used for moving the ships or forming the giant cannon barrel, but now they were used for something else.

“To lower the Musashino and catch me as I fall...”

But that was not all.

“Are they negating the effects of my reverse roll!?”

Neshinbara had predicted the Lindwurm would powerfully twist his body during the instant of impact.

“Because that allows him to guide the destruction to the surface and inside of the ship. So...”

Neshinbara used a sign frame to provide instructions for controlling Musashino’s descent and he watched the giant dragon’s continued fall with narrowed eyes.

“So we moved the surface away from you.”

It had been a last-minute movement. That was why the ether supply management had to be done via Toori’s precise control instead of from the Musashi. They had activated only the necessary thrusters.

In truth...

...I considered hitting back to knock him away.

But that alone was not enough to settle things.

So he had done something their opponent would not predict in order to flip

him around.

“Heh. At that size, he can’t easily adjust his position in midair. If he keeps falling like this...”

Four Eyes: “Yes, yes. He will fall onto his back. We all get it and it’s fascinating, so just get on with it.”

Novice: “D-dammit! Stop ruining my moment!”

Bell: “...Huh?”

Flat Vassal: Ahhh, I’m feeling woozy after getting carried away earlier... Oh, what is it, Suzu-san?”

“Well,” said Suzu.

She was managing Musashino’s descent. It was a definite action and the Lindwurm was already located above their bridge.

But Suzu had this to say:

Bell: That dragon...person is rotating...even more? He’ll probably land...on his belly.”

Meaning...

Bell: “The height is...shifting.”

Neshinbara suddenly felt a chill down his spine.

But not because this was entirely unexpected.

...Here it comes!

And what happened was exactly what Neshinbara had feared. And everyone responded: **Almost Everyone:** “...”

...Wah! This silence is painful!

He saw the Lindwurm work to stop its movement overhead.

Musashino’s descent had reached its set position, so it was slowing.

The giant dragon spun its body and fell relatively slowly. And then...

Bell: “Oh, yes...it’s not...going to work out...right.”

...Don't say thaaaaaaaaaat!

Four Eyes: You stuuuuupid, stuuuuuuuuuupid boy! You're only a child who lives in the world of imagination!! Did you not even check the diagram!? Ah ha ha! This is so much fun, Toussaint! I've never had more fun!"

Mal-Ga: "She's not wrong."

Gold Mar: "What were you even trying to accomplish, Bara-yan?"

Obscene: "That is a difficult question! Let's all give it some thought!"

Laborer: "Wait. Let's not just assume Neshinbara is incompetent."

My savior! thought Neshinbara from the bottom of his heart.

Novice: "R-right!? Isn't that right!?"

Wise Sister: "That's right! We shouldn't just assume Neshinbara is incompetent. Wait a moment longer and we can prove it!"

Hori-ko: "How many more seconds now?"

Musashino: "The descent will end in seven seconds. Over."

Novice: "Isn't that a little too soon!? Right!?"

Oh, no, thought Suzu.

Neshinbara's initial calculations had been correct. But...

...Th-that person...picked up...speed in mid...air...

The dragon had made a forced correction.

Bell: "U-um."

Asama: "What is it, Suzu-san?"

Bell: "Th-this wasn't...Neshinbara...-kun's fault."

Almost Everyone: "..."

Mal-Ga: "How can this doujin boy make Suzu say such awful things...sob, sob."

Gold Mar: "Ga-chan, you don't have to pretend to cry just because things

aren't going your way."

Huh? I feel like something about this is wrong, thought Suzu.

Bell: "N-no, not...that. Neshinbara...-kun calculated it...correctly."

Novice: "Indeed. I-I did everything right, didn't I!?"

Smoking Girl: "And how did that turn out?"

Uqui: "So he did everything right, but he still couldn't make anything happen?"

Mal-Ga: "What's this? Are you giving me some impotency material?"

Gold Mar: "Ga-chan, isn't your mood getting a little too volatile!?"

Four Eyes: "Toussaint, can you explain what this is about?"

I feel like this is even more wrong, thought Suzu, but then...

Musashino: "The enemy Lindwurm is landing! Over."

Chapter 41: Roarer of the Hunting Ground

第四十一章

『狩り場の咆吼手』



戦いから遠く
時拆に思い出すならば
どれだけ距離は開いたのだ
配点 / (自分感覚)

If the memories sometimes return

While away from the battlefield

Just how far away are you?

Point Allocation (However Far It Feels To You)

It all came down to the moment before landing.

Torahide further twisted his body and built up his rotational force. In doing so...

...I increase the force of the impact when I hit!

For that, he twisted his body and aimed to land.

He dropped down to slam into the ship belly-first.

“...Perfect!”

He was confident his rotation and the landing would match up perfectly.

And just then, there was movement below him. Something flew out below his falling throat.

It was Musashi's Vice Chancellor.

She ran quickly in from the side and raised something below his throat.

It was a spear.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor balanced it perfectly and placed her hands on it twice and then thrice to make sure it was solidly in place.

“Okay, Tonbo Spare, when I say ‘go’, extend with your extension device.”

“Understood.”

Musashi's Vice Chancellor instantly jumped back by about 100 meters. And as soon as she landed...

“Go!”

“Extending.”

Everyone on the Musashi watched as the giant dragon bent backwards in the instant of landing instead of placing his forelegs on the ground to avoid the impact. But he failed to do so in time, the extending spear stabbed into his reverse scales, he bent back further, and his tail end smashed through two levels of the surface.

Far above Musashino, Horizon looked down from Tama while Asama supported her shoulders. She used a pause in the Song of Passage to turn toward Asama.

“What was that? I feel like a lot happened at once.”

“I-I’m not sure...”

But across on Murayama, Kimi was beginning their second time through the Song of Passage while dancing with Toori.

Asama knew what they were going to use that for.

“They’re supplying the people below with ether, Horizon!”

Torahide swung his foreleg.

With no sensation in his fingers, he could not grab the spear piercing his throat. So he used his great strength to scrape his arm along and force the spear out.

“Kwoh...!”

He flung the spear away. Or he meant to. However, he did not have a grip on the spear, so when he brushed it aside, it simply fell.

The blood erupted from his split throat. It was hot, but he could feel it dripping from his throat to his belly.

That’s the second time they’ve injured me there, he thought.

That was when he noticed something standing on the falling spear.

...That is...!

“The Peerless in the West!”

“I am currently the unaffiliated Tachibana Muneshige.”

He kicked the airborne Tonbo Spare.

He instantly moved in front of the dragon’s chest, spun around in midair, and did something.

“I see.”

He stood nearly perpendicularly on the edge of Torahide’s arched chest.

Muneshige breathed a mental sigh of admiration.

This was not his first time fighting a dragon. During his time in the New World, he had fought wild dragons a few times. However...

...While they were dragons, they were only about 30m.

The small size of their opponents had indicated what little progress they had made in developing the land.

This dragon was different. And he realized something while facing a dragon at this level.

Everything about them was on a larger scale. Yes, for example...

...Just looking at their external armor shows that most everything, from the structure to the maintenance, is on the level of a dragon.

Each individual scale of armor was made of a dense material, but it grew badly weathered and dirty.

Even if the front was well taken care of, the sides and back were the same as natural objects like stones or trees.

The dragon’s eyes could not see there, just like a human would not look between their fingernails.

“So if you try to set foot on one, you can do so almost anywhere.”

Then the dragon’s arm arrived. But Muneshige ran along the dragon’s chest.

He left the reverse scales, but he immediately returned and raised Kamenuki.

But not to pierce the dragon. Torahide’s reverse scales already had a deep

wound. Plunging Kamenuki into that wound would be relatively meaningless. He needed to use Kamenuki as a pointer, and...

“Gin! Over here.”

“Judge.”

The response arrived without delay.

It came from the air behind him.

Gin was there, pursuing him with Racing Words. So he spread his arms.

Gin twisted her body so her butt was pointed down and she plunged downwards while face-up.

The instant Muneshige caught her, Gin looked up with a combat expression.

Something there was targeting the dragon’s reverse scales.

“Pierce him...Arcabuz, Cuatro.”

She could still only summon one of Cuatro Cruz.

But combined with the two Arcabuz Cruzes, she fired thrice from close range and sent projectiles accurately into the dragon’s wound.

They were steel shells. And the one from Cuatro Cruz was meant for use against castles.

The dragon’s body was not as powerful as a castle, so his entire body shook violently from the throat.

Behind his forelegs, his back shook on either side and his body arched backwards.

The former Peerless in the West stood on his chest and held his wife in his arms.

“—————”

He suddenly jumped down from that chest. The dragon had opened his mouth.

“...!”

The great dragon swung his injured arms around, scratched at his chest, and tried to brush off his unseen enemy.

The former Peerless in the West had already jumped toward the ground and the cross cannons had been transferred back into their dual pitch space.

“Damn you...!”

The dragon bent backwards and arched his chest.

He spread his arms and bent so far back his head was looking backwards.

Then the giant dragon roared, even as blood flowed from his chest and stained his entire body.

“Ohh...!”

Everyone heard the dragon’s roar stretch out long and narrow.

It was loud, but the volume gradually grew even further.

He was not howling into the distance. He was simply crying out in a defenseless pose, so everyone fired weapons or spells while question marks formed in their heads.

Then the giant dragon’s entire body glowed with a dull light.

“His thrusters are going to blow!!”

After gathering ether with his roar, he would release the shockwave around him.

The dragon’s extended roar and the light simmering from his body told them something.

“This is gonna be the biggest one yet...!”

The dragon’s decision was obvious to everyone.

A straight-line dragon cannon might be blocked by the defense barriers opened by Musashino’s bridge.

But if he released a thruster explosion from close-range...

“He’ll destroy the already-damaged surface area and the underground area

below...!”

When one of the gunners shouted that, everyone else responded.

“That sounds like one of the Secretary’s ideas!”

“Judge! One of those ideas that everyone has but no one ever goes through with!”

“Okay, Secretary! Give us a countermeasure!”

As the dragon’s roar rang loudly, something responded to their voices.

A sign frame appeared in front of them and it showed the Secretary pushing up his glasses.

“Leave it to me. I’m already putting something together.”

Everyone gave a serious nod, and then...

“He actually answered us...!?”

Me: “Hey, Neshinbara, could you settle this sooner rather than later?”

Hori-ko: “Yes. Sooner would be great.”

Novice: “Yes, I know what you’re trying to say: I still haven’t returned your knight and samurai, have I?”

Righteousness: “More importantly, here it comes! My auditory devices are starting to crackle! ...It’s approaching the usual pattern when he releases his thruster explosion!”

Torahide looked up to the moons and opened every thruster on his body.

There was no stopping it now. From there, he only had to close his mouth, shut the solid sealing membrane in his throat, and let the dragon cannon circulate through his body instead of leave his mouth.

The moonlight feels nice, thought the dragon.

The injury to the reverse scales at the top of his chest was deep. The shells had entered deep inside.

But his dragon healing ability had chosen to heal him along with the shells.

The masses of metal remained inside him as the blood began to clot and close the wound.

The shells did not matter. When a dragon's blood contacted the air, it would grow hot enough to melt and absorb any foreign objects. That defense mechanism "preyed on" germs and pathogens, but it could also affect any shells and blades that entered his body.

In a few hours, the shells would take the place of the iron he had lost in his blood.

The moonlight accelerated the process.

One of the moons, the closer-in one, was said to be made of Orei Metallo, making it a mass of ether. When it reflected the light of the sun on the other side of the planet, it poured the power of ether down on the night.

That was why moonlit nights were a time for nonhumans. Torahide found it pleasant as he closed his throat.

Then his moonward gaze saw something.

It was round.

It was humanoid, but it was round, attached to a chain, and clearly being swung vertically.

"Ahyaaaaaaaaaaaaahhh!"

The mobile shell swung straight down and collided with the reverse scale wound.

Hori-ko: "I've been wondering. Is there any real reason for Adele-sama to be inside there?"

Asama: "...Ballast?"

Me: "Honestly, I think Adele might actually like doing that."

Aasma: "I had the more normal answer this time, right!? Right!?"

Righteousness: “Why do you upperclassmen have such childish arguments...?”

In the instant the falling mobile shell hit him, Torahide tensed his body.

And he realized he was unharmed.

The mobile shell had targeted his wound, but the blood had already clotted and was now as solid as armor.

That was not going to be broken by the mobile shell hammer.

He could convert the force of the impact into his roar and throw that power into the thruster explosion.

That settled it.

He could not destroy Musashino’s bridge, but he could tear away a large chunk of the ship and blow away the surrounding people.

So he did so.

He raised his voice as the impact hit him.

But that voice did not power the thruster explosion.

It was a cry of pain.

The dragon’s agony reverberated above Musashino.

One man saw the cause from Musashino’s bridge.

“Splendid.”

In the captain’s seat, Suzu turned back toward that voice and then she smiled.

“Vice Principal...Yoshinao...?”

“Judge. ...I apologize about before. I will watch calmly this time.”

A large sign frame was open at the front of the bridge. It displayed a single moment: Adele’s mobile shell raising a weapon in its right arm.

It was a vassal’s long spear.

The spear had a beast emblem on it and it had been stored in the mobile shell's tail stabilizer, but...

"Did she wait until the very last second to grab it so that the dragon would not see it?"

Yoshinao looked to his wife who gasped alongside him. He took her hand and spoke.

"It seems she has yet to master its use, but someday, surely."

After all...

"The beast has left the kingdom of protection and entered the field of aggression."

Adele's body was covered in a dull sweat.

...*W-wow...*

She had once fought a much smaller dragon than this. Back then, she had not used her mobile shell, so she had charged in without it and created a starting point for the others.

Looking back, she was amazed by her own courage.

After all, she was much safer now inside the mobile shell, but...

...*The pressure is intense!*

She was not laying the groundwork for or assisting an attack.

She had to do real damage as the main attacker.

If she missed, the entire strategy would fall apart.

She could not let that happen. So it was intense.

"Kh."

Her right arm shook from the tension.

Her right hand controlled the mobile shell's right arm, which drove the 3m spear into the dragon's throat.

This was not just a clash.

The mobile shell's wrist slid back to the elbow.

Igniting the spell gunpowder there would create a simple pile bunker.

She had used this countless times in training and practice, but this was her first time doing so in actual combat.

She did it. But...

"O-outside..."

The footage sent in by her mobile shell's sight devices only showed her the color black.

The nighttime brightness amplification was activated, but the dragon was probably just too close.

...What happened?

As soon as she wondered that, Raging Beast was tugged from behind.

The mobile shell rose quite quickly as Mitotsudaira's silver chains pulled it.

And Adele saw the result of her action straight ahead, which was really down below.

The dragon's chest had been badly broken.

Immediately afterwards, the dragon made a great noise.

It was not the thruster explosion. The enemy had great power built up, but that power burst from his entire body.

"He self-destructed," muttered Mitotsudaira on the nighttime street.

She was in a student dorm district near the bow. That put her approximately 70m away from Torahide.

She faced forward while quickly pulling Adele back so the mobile shell slid along Musashino's main road.

The dragon was there.

But even if he was shaking, he did not move any more than that. He simply spurted blood from his entire body while looking like he was trying to eat the moon.

...A great roar leading into a thruster explosion.

That was one of a dragon's greatest techniques and it meant to release his power from his entire body.

It could be seen as the greatest form of presenting his awe. But...

"What if he felt uneasy just before releasing his pride?"

That unease did not have to be felt in his heart.

A dragon would respond to a threat as an animal. So...

"Gin's shells wouldn't have been absorbed by his body yet. So even if he closed the wound and solidified his defense..."

Mitotsudaira swung both arms to rapidly pull in her silver chains.

"The mobile shell's spear damaged the wound. The spear pushed the shells further inside his body and the mobile shell's collision smashed through the reverse scale armor to open the wound."

As a result, his reverse scale weak point had been fully destroyed and the spear and shells had pierced into him.

The dragon's body had reacted to those two results in one way.

Regardless of the dragon's will, his body had rejected it.

...That's right.

No matter what the dragon wanted, if he left his weak point destroyed and the foreign objects inside him, his body would react. His entire body would avoid the enemy's attack and close in on itself so no further foreign objects could be driven inside him.

The dragon's body would instinctually close all sensory organs and thrusters.

But Torahide was in the middle of carrying out a thruster explosion.

What would happen if the dragon tried to breathe out from his entire body

just as his instincts tried to close everything up?

The answer was right there.

All of the dragon's thrusters had blown themselves up and blood flowed from his entire body.

He stood up, but he was unsteady and his raised arms slowly lowered.

There was light in his eyes, but...

"Gah..."

His own attack power must have scorched him deep in his throat.

But, thought Mitotsudaira.

"A name inheritor isn't going to end it there, are they?"

Horizon listened to Mitotsudaira's words.

"Horizon? ...You asked when is the right time to live and to die, didn't you?"

"———"

"Unfortunately, I cannot answer that as I am still on the path of life that ends in death. In all likelihood, most everyone is the same," she said. "But I think it is best to live and arrive at that end with no regrets."

"Mitotsudaira-sama."

"What is it?"

Horizon asked a question of the silver wolf who stood so far below.

"Do you know how to do that? ...To have no regrets?"

"No."

She received a short but definite rejection.

And the wolf said more as if to make up for that.

"But...my mother apparently tried to live on her own, grew bored, and decided it would be better to die."

So...

“Being with someone else might create regrets. But the more people there are, perhaps the regrets can be divided among them and the enjoyable things can be shared among them.”

Mitotsudaira had a sudden thought.

...It might be good to visit home every once in a while.

Of course, her parents had friends and plenty of people they worked with.

It was wrong to think they might be lonely because it was only the two of them.

“Yes, there’s nothing to worry about. It’s only the two of us here. ...Eh? People walk through here? What do we do if someone shows up? O-oh, come on. Why would you say something so indecent? You know imagining it is only going to get me more excited. Also, there is no need to worry about that. I mean, you’re the only one with your clothes off right now. ...Hee hee. You say you can’t hide with your back against the wall like this? ...But I believe you were the one trembling with loneliness? A wolf isn’t about to leave someone like that to his loneliness.”

The moon is out, so my mother is probably in top form, thought Mitotsudaira.

And...

...I’m no different.

She faced forward.

Between her and the dragon, Mary looked back her way.

Mary smiled, nodded, and waved.

The scary part was how she had not moved at all since the battle began.

...She has guts...

The Secretary had ordered her to stand there as bait, but the 1st Special Duty

Officer had to be hidden and waiting somewhere nearby.

He was hidden to make Mary's role as bait more effective, but...

Gold Mar: "I've been seeing some threads on the divine network titled 'That Ninja Ran Away'."

Mal-Ga: "Huh? I started the first one, but it looks like they're already on thread #127."

10ZO: "I-it's not true! It's not true at all! And one of you started this!?"

Mary could not hear them, but she seemed happy just being with the 1st Special Duty Officer.

But while they were unharmed, the enemy was still there.

The dragon was injured and he had broken his body. It would take too long for his healing ability to mend his body.

While giving him time to listen and respond to their words, she looked up at the dragon.

He looked black with the moon behind him and his bestial shape was revealed by the light reflecting off of his steaming blood.

She could faintly see his bloodstained dragon eye in the moonlight.

Because it was night, she could tell the pupil formed a black circle beyond that color. He was leaning a bit to the left and viewing her with his left eye.

Mitotsudaira pulled the four silver chains back and made an announcement.

"Withdraw. Sanada's Chancellor and Musashi are on friendly terms."

Tonbokiri: "We had him forcibly sent away on charges of molestation earlier. Does that count as friendly?"

Gold Mar: "That happens a lot among friends."

Yes, it does, agreed Mitotsudaira before something else occurred to her.

...This dragon's attack isn't a response to sending away their Chancellor, is it?

No. It wouldn't be that. Probably.

But Mitotsudaira cleared her throat and took a combat stance.

“What will you do?”

Her question was answered from an elevated position.

“Humans would look down on dragons? Telling me to withdraw is an insult to all dragons.”

“No,” said Mitotsudaira. “My king shall conquer the Far East. ...He will be equal to the dragons. And I am his knight.”

Torahide released a short breath.

...Was that a laugh?

She did not know what it meant. Was he mocking her? Agreeing with her? She had not encountered enough dragons to interpret their expressions of emotion. But there was one thing she understood.

“Here I go.”

They were challengers.

Mitotsudaira set herself running.

She instantly passed Mary and filled the gap between herself and the dragon.

On the way, the English princess handed her something.

“Take this.”

It was one of the Excaliburs. The wolf held that definite power in her hand. From there, she launched herself forward and leaped into empty air.

There was nothing there. She was too far away to reach the dragon. But there was a foothold there.

“Silver chain!”

She had a silver chain bounce sharply off the ground and swung up the tight arm on the end. She used that toss to increase her altitude by 17 meters.

But that was still not enough if she was to confront this standing dragon on equal ground.

...I need another 30 meters...!

So she sent out two other silver chains.

The silver chains weaved together like a ladder, but with unpredictable movements, and she launched herself up between them and flew up into the sky.

As she picked up speed, the rapid ascent pushed at her stomach. And...

...Here it comes...!

The dragon launched an attack.

He used his left hand. He was already leaning somewhat forward and to the left, so he struck with the left.

And the high-speed trio of claws broke through a water vapor explosion as he swung his arm.

The strike was difficult to see and the noise did not reach her since it broke the sound barrier. Plus...

“The severed claws are recovering, aren’t they!?”

Torahide used his entire body to strike.

The prized claws of his left hand were still severed.

But the nerves and blood vessels that passed through those claws had been sealed up and the fist was not bleeding. The sensation of the claws was somewhat filled with heat, but otherwise fine.

He could use his claws once more. Torahide rejoiced when he confirmed that in the moonlight.

He had made his attack in time.

...That’s right!

He had failed in his own thruster explosion earlier.

But there were no thrusters in his fingers.

And his first injury had been the severed claws of his left arm.

After detecting the injury, he had not forced it to strike and had instead kept

the elbow bent and the hand protected.

He had known he would need his strength at some point.

He smiled bitterly in his heart as he wondered why dragons had such a tendency to plan for the future. But this was good enough for him.

After all, he was an animal, but...

“I am a member of Sanada...!”

“Ohh...!”

Torahide thought about his former self.

He thought about eight hundred years ago and four hundred years ago.

During the history recreation of the Germanic migration, their forces had grown, they had swept across the Harmonic World’s Europe, and they had continued from there.

Of course, there had been more than just dragons. They had their origins in Northern and Eastern Europe, but there had been humans and other nonhumans too and they had mixed together a lot more in the early days.

He had destroyed and devoured as much as he had wanted, but the next thing he knew...

...The others were gone.

Among the dragons, the peaceful faction had broken away. Among the human and other nonhumans, most had found a land to settle down in during the migration and they had left.

Those who had remained had grown more radical and continued fighting, but they had ultimately ended up in Sicily.

...And four hundred years ago, we were defeated and retreated.

The humans had formed a Testament Cross-Borders Unit and opposed them. The weather had also begun to change, creating a disadvantageous time for the dragons.

When they had ultimately lost and obeyed the course of history, he had wondered something: *Have I only been following the course of history?*

Had his elation, joy, and conversations with his companions been no more than a part of predetermined history? So once that enjoyable time was over, would everything simply follow the course of history as before?

Torahide recalled his memories as a dragon and his roar changed.

“...Eight hundred years ago...!”

Where was that world full of his companions?

What were his companions doing after they had parted ways?

Where had the small humans and other nonhumans gone?

He did not know.

He did not know, but as a long-lived and intelligent dragon, he had to bear it all and could never forget. And if they were to become more than a mere Terrestrial Dragon’s memories and be placed on equal footing with the world...

...I must be one who moves history...!

He had to be equal.

And if he was fond of this world, he could be with it.

And if he was not fond of this world, he could change it or stray from it and be alone.

Was that decision no more than the selfishness of a single animal?

Or was it the decision of someone who was equal to this world where he had spent time with and spoken with his friends?

It made a major difference when he viewed it in terms of his own existence.

That was what it meant to face history.

That was what it meant to bear everything he had enjoyed and face it all on equal footing.

They had lost and fled, but the time spent with his companions...

...It was real!

Yes, thought Torahide.

I must be a fool, he also thought. I have been so focused on the freedom I had eight hundred years ago that I was restricting myself in the present.

But...

“Humans...!”

He had not felt this excited in a long time. He spoke to the knight who was spinning around in the air and preparing to do battle with him.

...This takes me back.

It had been a group much like this that defeated them four hundred years before.

He raised his voice while thinking about that.

“I am a dragon! But I am a dragon who has inherited a name which places me on the same level as this world! So if you wish to rule this world...”

He struck.

“Start by overcoming its scout!”

Mitotsudaira saw the enemy’s attack arriving from dead ahead.

She only had an instant to move, but the enemy’s attack was massive.

If she did not dodge enough, she would be swallowed up by the shockwave produced by that supersonic arm.

However, if she evaded too far, she would put Mary and the others in danger.

...In that case...

Mitotsudaira kicked off of the silver chain for a burst of speed.

She finally went in to finish this.

Torahide made his strike.

His left hand’s claws pierced the night air.

“...Kah!!”

He definitely felt the hit land.

There was a weight there.

This was not like before. His claws were sensitive from the pain, so he could sense the weight of his enemy's body.

...I did it!

He swung those claws and roared.

Eight hundred years ago, their king and the others had been defeated by humans. Four hundred years ago, they had been defeated and forced into retreat.

They had surrendered their world, even if that only meant Europe.

And now he was faced by a knight who said her king would conquer the Far East.

Humans always spoke of the world when opposing dragons.

As it should be, thought Torahide while continuing to swing his left claws.

The tips of his fingers tore at the air and audibly split the atmosphere.

He struck.

A moment later, wind exploded along the line through which his arm had passed.

His claws were enveloped by a shockwave. The great noise passed through the sky and reverberated across the Musashi.

The echoing sound of impact had likely reached Sanada.

He had torn through his enemy.

As soon as his claws had pierced her, the weight caught on his hand had vanished.

The enemy was gone from the sky in front of him. That meant she had either been knocked away or torn to pieces before he could see her.

“Ohh...!”

Torahide roared.

...I defeated my first enemy here!

This was enemy territory. Next up was the English prince who was standing there as bait. Then came Musashino's bridge.

And he pulled back his left arm which was extended forward.

But it was not just his left claws that he used to strike the English princess in front of him.

Feeling had already returned to his right claws as well. So he used both forelegs and his entire body.

He would make full use of his great form to crush the enemy. So he leaned back, and...

"————?"

Torahide felt an odd weight on his left hand.

That was the one he was pulling back.

There was a strong pulling sensation like it was caught on something. However...

...There's nothing there?

There was no evident weight on the three claws and fingers of his left foreleg. But...

...There isn't any blood either!?

What did that mean?

What had happened to the pieces of the struck enemy? Where had the obvious blood, flesh, and bone fragments gone? And what was this weight he felt as he pulled the hand back?

"Over there!?"

He saw a figure in the night sky ahead and a bit to the left.

They were soaring rapidly toward him.

"Musashi's knight...!"

The enemy was unharmed.

Mitotsudaira sliced through the air and made a midair charge with Excalibur at the ready.

There was a path in the air below her feet.

Musashino had released a few towing belts and created horizontal paths from them.

The silver wolf hit those paths and leaped between them as she accelerated.

She thought to herself while making several bursts of acceleration and racing forward.

...Honestly.

She lightly clenched her back teeth while forming the words in her mouth.

...I'm barely scraping by with every last bit of this!

Yoshiyasu watched the wolf's charge while Righteousness rapidly cooled.

...I'm impressed she would choose a method like that!

Yoshiyasu was not talking about the wolf's attack.

She meant the evasion.

When faced with a decision about how to avoid Torahide's claws, the Mito Lord had chosen a wide evasion.

She had likely decided she needed to keep her distance to avoid the shockwave. But...

"That is not enough to defeat Torahide."

With the shockwave, she could still easily be blown away and removed from the battlefield.

So the Mito Lord had responded to the enemy's strike with a method available only to her: the chains.

While moving far out of the way of the dragon's claws, she had attached the silver chains to those claws. And those chains had been shaped like her own body.

Attaching the chains had swung her around from the dragon's fist.

She had flown in a wide arc to starboard as she flew out and around the dragon's left claws.

That position placed her in the dragon's blind spot due to his claws and arm.

From there, she only had to adjust the length of the chains while they carried her through that safe zone.

...She intentionally let the dragon's high-speed strike swing her around and toss her into the distance.

From Yoshiyasu's perspective, the Mito Lord was swinging around the dragon's left hand and had flown about 200m. And...

"When the dragon quickly pulled his arm back, she was pulled along with it, accelerating her toward him. She released the chains at the same time as the towing belt platforms appeared underfoot."

The rest was simple.

She charged forward with the ultra-high speed built up by the dragon swinging her around and pulling her forward.

Plus...

"She's increasing the force of her charge using the ether support from her king and the others...!"

Mitotsudaira thought, *I am not alone as I race through the sky.*

Power was reaching her. It was quite a lot of power and it was coming from the sky above.

"Tama and Murayama. It's coming from my king, Kimi, Asama, and Horizon..."

The ether supply lines bundled together and enveloped her charging body.

Light resided in Excalibur and purification entered it.

This purification power-up would allow nothing to get in the way of the blade's power. Several *torii*-style sign frames appeared ahead of her and eliminated anything that might interfere with her flight.

And a few sign frames appeared. The first was from Asama:

"Your acceleration will reach its peak just before you hit the dragon. Please keep going and strike him!"

"Judge," she replied as the sign frame showed Horizon standing in front of Asama and raising her right thumb.

Similarly, the next sign frame over showed her king beckoning her.

Eh? she thought as his sign frame gradually moved further and further out ahead of her.

"Okayyy, good girl. Come, come."

"I am not a dog...!!"

With that, the knight accelerated and passed through her king's sign frame.

"I will hunt down my prey...!"

Her king nodded and spoke.

"Go get him."

So she did so.

"Judge."

She ran.

The distance quickly shrank and there were only about 30 meters left.

At the same time, Torahide took action in front of her.

He bent back and opened his mouth.

He was firing a dragon cannon.

He could not have accumulated a full charge of ether inside his body, but...

"...This is a dragon's pride, isn't it!?"

But, she thought.

“A wolf’s pride takes precedence in the moonlight!”



The silver wolf first launched four attacks.

The charging wolf sent her chains out in four directions.

Their paths were more like ricochets than curves as they bounced off the surface and toward Torahide's throat.

She targeted the reverse scales.

But the dragon did not care.

No matter what attack reached him, he was not going to stop the roaring in his throat and the way he opened his maw caused light to gather deep in that throat.

A moment later, four silver chains struck the dragon's reverse scales.

Something shaped like giant blades stabbed sharply into him.

They were Torahide's severed claws.

It would not have been so bad had they been foreign objects.

The dragon's entire body was in the process of healing. His blood would digest all foreign objects and act as a catalyst for the restoration of his flesh, blood, and armor.

But his claws had been shoved into him instead.

A dragon's claws were made of almost the same material as the external armor. Thus, they would not be digested or dissolved while repairing his body and they simply made their presence known in his reverse scales.

"———!"

The dragon bent back even further.

But he endured. And he tried to bend his serpentine body forward to launch his dragon cannon.

In that instant, the wolf collided with the base of his throat.

The silver wolf struck with Excalibur while using an acceleration spell and gaining extra inertial weight thanks to a divine protection.

Suzu held her teacup and sensed the dragon's entire body lift up.

Standing next to her, "Musashino" nodded once and spoke.

"Well done. Using the ether supply from Toori-sama and the divine protection from Asama-sama, Mitotsudaira-sama was virtually given additional collision power equal to 1/300th that of the entire Musashi. Normally, when creating the shell for firing the Kanesada main cannon-..."

" 'Musashino' ...-san! H-here it comes!"

Suzu continued to monitor the enemy.

He had been hit by Mitotsudaira's attack, but his head collapsed forward.

"I have determined he is targeting this bridge. Over."

Gold Mar: "Eh? How? Are you sure he isn't going to cry out in pain or blow himself up again after taking that much damage?"

Uqui: "I cannot know for sure, but he most likely sealed his throat in advance."

The half-dragon explained what that meant.

Uqui: "If he is simply hit by an attack, the damage will break the seal. But if he predicts it in advance, the seal will be released naturally and the dragon cannon will be fired. That is a method of ensuring a final attack even if he dies or passes out."

Four-Eyes: "That is useful information... Oh, where's it going to hit?"

Novice: "Heh. Right here! Got a problem with that!?"

Suzu wondered if that was really the place for a "heh" of laughter, but the dragon had definitely released a beam of light.

It was a dragon cannon.

Light scattered through the sky.

It scattered between the dragon and Musashino's bridge.

The dragon cannon flew in a straight line, but...

“Defense barriers, hm?”

Torahide watched as shards of light danced like a blizzard.

Some of them were the shards of the several layers of defense barriers that were instantly shattered and others were scattered pieces of his dragon cannon.

His final attack had been blocked.

...Well done.

“They measured my attacks during the battle. And they made adjustments so they could open just enough defense barriers to stop it, didn’t they?”

He looked across the scene overhead.

There were seven ships there and an automaton stood on the edge of each one.

Those were the captain automatons of each ship.

They had probably measured his attacks while Musashi’s shrine maiden had gathered that data and managed the ether supply. He was certain they had used the Musashi Chancellor’s ether supply spell to control Musashi’s own ether supply management.

He should have caught on when the silver wolf had used that to accelerate.

He should have realized they were not fighting individually.

...I see.

He was a Terrestrial Dragon and a Lindwurm. His 120m body was too much for humans to handle.

But the Musashi was...

“Quasi-Bahamut-class. ...I suppose that was too much for a single Terrestrial Dragon to handle.”

With that, his back exploded.

Blood splattered into the sky behind the dragon as if he had grown new wings.

It was a red blossom.

The silver wolf's impact had permeated all the way through him and left from his back. His body was built to withstand the shaking he himself produced, but the damage that broke through that passed through his flesh and bones.

The connection between his shoulders and back split apart and the armor connections at the base of his wings were blown away.

The parts that moved his secondary and primary armor had evolved from muscles, but they now swelled out and burst.

And not just in one or two places. Blood intermittently erupted from points all across the back of his body.

However, this did not propel him forward.

At this point, the dragon could only collapse backwards.

He collapsed face-up. As if to expose his belly to the two moons in the sky, the giant dragon named Torahide collapsed as proof that his battle had ended.

But there was something to catch him there.

“———!?”

Ivy.

Gentle stalks of ether grew from Musashino's surface. They made wavelike motions as they enveloped and held the collapsing dragon.

Someone had been watching the dragon's defeat the entire time.

This manifestation of healing came from a spirit spell used by the English princess.

Torahide remembered something as he collapsed into and was caught by a massive amount of recovery spells.

“English princess, this spell...”

“Judge. It is a dryad recovery spell passed down by my mother’s family. In England, it is passed down as a Celtic method, but the spell was originally used by any European dryad.”

But...

“My mother’s ancestors, the great dryad spirits, originally lived in Europe, but during your great migration, they moved to England to save the Celtic people. At the time, England had the geological features of the ocean bed’s bedrock, so it was difficult to grow trees there and my ancestor’s power was needed.”

Torahide gasped.

As the ivy surrounded him, he watched leaves spread from it while a portion took a forest-like shape.

...Ohh.

He recalled a former time. He recalled the healing ceremony his companions had used on him in between battles.

The dryads back then had not used a spell as large as this. They had used small spells that could only heal one of his claws.

He had laughed and told them it was no use, but he had still let them do it as they conversed in the night.

Then the English princess spoke gently to him.

“Of the dragons spoken of in England, the most important are the flying serpentine dragons known as Lindwurms. You helped my ancestors cross over to England and you visited out of concern a few times afterwards. ...In England, the shape of the Lindwurm is often spoken of, but legends of your defeat or existence are rare. In fact...”

In fact...

“One ancient noble family still uses your form on their coat of arms. ...You are a Lindwurm, a descendant of England’s guardian dragons. I may not know what occurred in the past, but please allow this descendant of England to ask this just once more.”

“What is that?”

“Judge,” said the English princess, but he could only hear it through the forest of ether by this point.

It was a deep forest.

It was unlike the dark forests of Northern and Eastern Europe, but he knew he had once seen this forest in those small forms.

...Ohh.

Now that he had inherited a name and faced the world on equal footing, everyone from back then had to be standing behind him.

And this resident of the new world asked her question.

“If you will calm down, I will remove Excalibur.”

But...

“If you will not calm down, Excalibur will be removed.”

So...

“Now,” she said. “Which will it be?”

Torahide smiled in his heart.

On the edge of his memories, the past aligned with the present.

He recalled those former times.

During the great invasion eight hundred years ago, they had fought on the front line and been injured on a daily basis.

They had often returned with the enemy’s weapons and fragments thereof piercing their bodies. The humans and spirits had been worried for the dragons, despite how small they were.

They had said the same thing back then. Even when he had told them the blades piercing him would be absorbed with time, they had stood before him and spoken without fear.

...If I will calm down, hm?

That was asking too much.

A dragon's instincts made them react sensitively to injuries. Every single time, they would pull out the sword, his body would react to the pain, and he would say, "See? What did I tell you?"

But, thought Torahide.

Has nothing changed even now?

So he gave his consent while admitting defeat.

And a thought occurred to that dragon.

He was old, but he had not declined.

...It's just...

I used to be younger, he thought as he closed his eyes.

The dragon shut his eyes while remembering long distant times and his companions from those times.

Chapter 42: Guide to the Defenseless Room

第四十二章

『無防備部屋の案内者』



他人がいないと出来ない幾何学
自分だけでは作れない座標
相手と生んでいく距離
配点（無防備）

A geometry only possible with someone else

A coordinate you cannot create alone

A distance formed with a partner

Point Allocation (Defenseless)

“It seems Musashi has done something pretty crazy...”

Below the moons, a ninja girl Mouse peered into the depths of a trench.

She looked up and saw a two-horned figure in the moonlight.

“Ujinao-sama. How would you fight against a dragon?”

“Hee hee. Kotarou...how about I activate World’s Steepest Mountains from dead ahead?”

“No, that wasn’t what I meant.”

Kotarou moved from the trench to Ujinao and pointed to the northern sky. Then she raised her eyebrows and spoke.

“If we are to accurately follow the history recreation, we will be up against Musashi next. And Musashi just made a show of force against the surrounding nations by driving back part of Sanada’s forces.”

“Testament. That is correct, Kotarou. But what about it?”

“Can Houjou do the same?”

“Well.” Ujinao placed an index finger on her mouth and looked into the sky. After a while, “We cannot do the same thing.”

“No, Ujinao-sama. Just to be clear, I mean achieve the same result, not use the exact same method.”

“I see.” Ujinao smiled a little. “You are cleverer than you used to be, Kotarou.”

“I’m not that-...w-wait, why are you treating me like a child!?”

“Calm down, Kotarou.”

“Of course.” Kotarou calmed down. And, “If we can’t do it that way, how can

we do it?”

“Use a few transport ships to block the way forward and crush it from above. ...Of course, that is assuming a ground battle.”

“And if it’s an aerial battle?”

“Use one transport ship as bait, briefly trap them on that ship, and then have our warships concentrate fire on that ship,” calmly said Ujinao. “That should be enough if we only need to defeat them. Of course, we would also need to focus on *how* we win. ...That would show we are willing to singlehandedly defeat them using any means necessary.”

“And that is the lesson of the Warring States?”

“No, it is simply my personality, Kotarou.”

Kotarou’s shoulders drooped a little at that.

“Ujinao-sama...”

“Now, now,” said Ujinao. “A lot of power and people are gathering at Houjou right now. No matter what group attempts to attack, they will be able to do things a dragon cannot.”

She pointed at the trench.

Kotarou looked that way and saw glowing lights slowly rise from the bottom.

“Look, firefly season is about to end.”

Ujinao turned around as if to pursue the fireflies that gently passed by.

At the depths of the night, a flat surface formed a dark blue silhouette in the moonlight.

But that vast space contained countless people and structures.

“I wonder when Musashi will reach Odawara Castle here.” The words spilled from Ujinao’s smile. “It’s nice to have this time to wait. After all, we are waiting for history, Kotarou.”

“...Torahide-san was defeated?”

A voice appeared in the depths of the darkness.

In the thick trees and accumulated leaves of the forest, the ground slowly peeled away and stood up.

A boy was visible on the mossy ground below a large tree.

“That was some good sleep. My arm is a lot better too. ...Mochizuki, can I chat with you?”

“Testament. ...If you do not mind me preparing you a late dinner while you do so, Kakei-sama.”

“Oh, give me something, too. Please,” said a female voice from up in the tree.

Only tree branches and leaves were visible in the forest, but something moved in the direction of that female voice.

It was a maid automaton. She briefly appeared in the darkness, and...

“Here it comes, Unno-sama.”

She used just her elbow and wrist to swiftly throw a teacup set and a paper wrapper.

“Ohh,” said Unno’s voice along with the sound of catching the thrown objects.

By then, Kakei and Mochizuki had already disappeared into the darkness on the ground.

Unno spoke after a while:

“Huh? English-style fried potatoes? Where did you get these from?”

“I do not store only explosives in my phase space. If I store a heating pot, oil, and fuel, I can fry foods even during battle.”

“Shouldn’t you quit this whole Ten Braves business and return to being a maid?” asked Kakei.

“I would do so right away if you could recruit a new member to make up for the introduced deficiency in fighting power.”

“Well, that ain’t happening,” said Unno with a sigh. “We’re also going to have to make up for Isa. Both our Sasuke and Sasuke-sensei are going to be upset.”

No one responded to that.

But Mochizuki spoke after the sound of a flock of birds taking flight in the distance.

“Thank you very much, Unno-sama.”

“I didn’t really say anything. And more importantly...”

“You mean Torahide-sama, don’t you? ...Are you worried too, Kakei-sama? After all, he would be Kakei Juuzou’s father according to the Testament.”

“My ‘teacher’ was already gone by the time we arrived in Sanada. That’s why Torahide-san looked after me so much. ...He was surprisingly fond of humans.”

“Paternal or maternal, everyone has those instincts.”

“Even me?” asked Kakei just before a branch with a sharpened end flew down from overhead.

Mochizuki appeared in midair for just an instant and caught the branch. She spun it around in her fingers, used it to skewer the chicken she had fried, and threw it back.

The straight-flying fried chicken skewer ultimately vanished into the shadows.

“Nice.”

“Thank you very much.” Mochizuki cleared her throat once. And, “It seems Torahide-sama is currently being transported by ship on Sanada Nobuyuki-sama’s orders. They said it was difficult to load him aboard even Sanada’s largest transport ship, the Ueda Castle.”

“Hah. The older brother. ...Wouldn’t it have been better to use the Numata as a transport ship?”

“They probably didn’t expect this to happen,” said Kakei. “Torahide-san is the strongest of Sanada’s Terrestrial Dragons, yet the records show they pulled off a no-damage run against him.”

“Yes, but Musashi’s front central ship, the Musashino, was lightly damaged and some more damage was confirmed on the neighboring ships of Murayama and Tama. ...Should we interpret that as nothing taking priority over people’s

lives?”

“This was their way of saying they aren’t wrong to substitute in something else if it means they’ll survive.” Kakei spoke into the sky while producing the sound of rolling over. “That was a good way to win. The Musashi was damaged, but they defeated a dragon while the people fighting remained almost entirely unscathed. They can just repair the Musashi, you see. So...”

So...

“Since the Musashi has survived, it means that group can even defeat dragons.”

Kakei mentally held his head in his hands.

...Okayyy, this has gotten bad.

Torahide had been a pretty capable member of Sanada’s dragons. He had sometimes gone all out against them to test them during training, but they had been forced to focus almost entirely on evasion.

But to Kakei...

“Torahide-san was a good match for me. ...His armor is full of blind spots, so I could fire all the bullets I wanted.”

“Yeah, and who was it that seriously pissed him off that one time, causing him to fire a full-power dragon cannon?”

“What was his ridiculous excuse? ‘Think of it as anti-warship training’?”

He laughed a little, so did that mean he was beginning to calm down some? But...

“Our insolence was thanks to our training with Torahide-san and the others. Without that, we never could’ve faced the Reine des Garous.”

“Don’t act like you weren’t terrified.”

Of course he had been. She was the same size as a human, but he had sensed a presence on the level of a Celestial Dragon. And that was before she had shown off her aggressive side.

“Mouri is raising a monster like that.”

“We have several ourselves and we’ve been trained to that level, haven’t we?”

“...C’mon now.”

He did understand how Unno felt, but he was the rational gunslinger. So he looked up into the sky.

“You’re being too aggressive. Don’t forget why our teachers accepted us.”

“Yes, but...” said Unno before trailing off.

The atmosphere grew stagnant, but that was fine as long as it was calm. But he did think he had said too much.

...Honestly.

Why am I the one feeling down after giving her a warning?

But another voice spoke up as if in response to his thoughts.

“I have not forgotten. ...Because I am an automaton,” added Mochizuki before continuing. “When we arrived at Sanada, our teachers met us deep in the ruins that have become the school building. And after quickly ascertaining our aptitude, they recruited us as the next Ten Braves. And when they did, they said this to us.”

That was a long time ago, but they remembered it and would never forget it.

“ ‘Even if you inherit these names, you need not die.’ ”

After all...

“They were approaching the end of their Celestial Dragon lifespans. So even though the Ten Braves are meant to die at the Siege of Osaka, they would ‘complete it in advance’. ...That is what our teachers told us.”

“I cannot accept Isa-sama’s death,” said Mochizuki.

Her optimization as an automaton had to ask ‘why’.

Why had Isa been so fixated on destroying the Musashi and why had she

needed to risk her life for it?

She did not know. Of course, the others did not either. And that was why Unno said what she did: “Can’t you conclude she pushed herself too hard and failed to escape in time?”

“Unno-sama, when I cannot find an answer, giving me a question you cannot answer will only leave me with two equally unanswerable questions.”

“I see you’re unfamiliar with the concept of consolation...”

“Thaaaat’s it right there,” said Kakei’s voice from around where he was.

Something was thrown into that area of empty air: something in a paper wrapper.

“Thanks.”

“You are very welcome.”

Mochizuki loosened and then retightened all of her body’s wire cylinders. She adjusted her hardware as she spoke.

“If the previous generation’s Isa-sama were with us, could he have explained Isa-sama’s actions?”

“Mochizuki,” said Kakei quietly. “You probably know the answer for yourself. You just haven’t noticed.”

“Hm? What do you mean?”

“It’s a question about one’s way of life.”

That short line brought Mochizuki’s decision-making to a stop. She slowly turned toward the darkness where he was.

...All I did was ask a question.

How did that question become an answer?

A question was a question. Only by going through the subsequent process could it become an answer. So how?

“What-...”

Just as she prepared to ask “do you mean”, Unno spat her voice down from

above.

“Oh, you are so full of yourself.”

“I wasn’t talking to you,” said Kakei.

That exchange was a common occurrence between those two. It did not mean Unno actually felt any antipathy toward what Kakei was saying.

Thus, concluded Mochizuki. What Kakei-sama said is correct, but it is simply outside my understanding.

Mochizuki judged Kakei correctly. He was probably only pretending to lie down while he was actually sitting and facing the darkness to stand guard.

“Thank you very much.”

“Huh? Mochizuki, don’t tell me Kakei’s won you over.”

“That’s what happens when you’re a virtuous person, you idiot,” said Kakei. “But have you two noticed?”

“The birds, you mean?”

Unno threw her branch skewer into the darkness overhead.

...I have determined that was well done.

A flock of birds had been heard taking flight earlier. Mochizuki’s auditory devices had detected someone or a group of someones either approaching or passing by nearby.

Unno had thrown her chicken so they would notice that.

And with that clear, Unno quietly spoke while viewing things from above.

“Based on the movements of the forest, there’s a large number coming here. But there’s one large group and one small group. I also sense aerial ships. ...Do you think they’re enemies?”

“I have determined this is enemy territory,” said Mochizuki. “I would have liked to wait and see what they do, but they appear to have already noticed us. One group’s footsteps have come to a stop.”

“What a pain...” complained Kakei.

“Indeed,” agreed Mochizuki. “I did not have time to serve dessert. But...”

But...

“If we are this busy on the outskirts, just how busy will Musashi be in Sanada?”

Adele felt refreshed.

“So refreshing!”

She could not help but say it aloud while wearing a yukata and chugging a bottle of fruit milk.

She was in one of the bathhouses run by Suzu’s family. Specifically, Suzu’s Bath on Okutama. It stayed open late into the night and they had rented it out using the Student Council’s authority, so all of the officers and participants in the previous battle were gathered there.

She did not know what was happening in the boys bath, but as for the girls bath...

...Pretty much everyone’s here except for Mitotsudaira and the others who went to grab their luggage.

Tomorrow they would descend to Sanada for the study camp.

But they all had work to do in order to clean up after the battle. They had considered going to the Student Council Room like the day before, but once they temporarily gathered on Musashino...

“Isn’t heading all the way to the back of Okutama a real pain?” suggested the Chancellor. “I mean, we’ve got the study camp tomorrow, right?”

Asama had raised her hand:

“I think we should purify ourselves because the dragon’s ether can have side effects. So either at my place or...”

And so they had gathered at Suzu’s bathhouse.

They were spending the night there and they would then load their luggage onto the ship down to the surface.

...Ohh! Camping out on the surface!

Adele quite liked the surface. The games imported from outside Musashi or playable on the divine network were almost always set on the surface. All the scenes there would have mountains and valleys, so...

...It really feels like you're way out in the middle of nowhere...

Deep in the mountains, inside a cave, or at the bottom of a valley were all places not found in life on the Musashi. The 1st Special Duty Officer and others would train on the local terrain whenever the Musashi docked, but the rest of them almost never had that kind of opportunity.

Heading to the surface felt like an adventure. Especially this time.

"We'll be investigating the ruins...!"

"Look forward to it if you want, but we can't let our guard down now that we've already seen the enemy."

That warning came from the Vice President who was drying herself off with a towel. She moved the clothes-cleaning algae creatures from her clothing basket to the main creature basket and then put on her underwear and inner suit without any tights.

That must have been what she wore as pajamas. Everyone had been too exhausted to change out of their track suits or combat clothing the night before, but tonight was different. They had to prepare for tomorrow.

"Ohhh, no. The sake from Asama-chi's bento just hit me all at once."

Yukata-wearing Naomasa lay on the floor with her removed prosthetic arm acting as a pillow, so Suzu quickly got her a futon.

Everyone else started laying out futons wherever they wanted, and Asama...

"Oh, what should we do about Mito, since she's still at her house?"

"How about here?"

Horizon laid out a futon for the 5th Special Duty Officer near the shelves of clothing baskets.

Why all the way at the end? wondered Adele before Kimi spoke from next to

her while grabbing Suzu from behind.

“The boys bath is over there. My foolish brother is sleeping just beyond that wall, isn’t he?”

“Judge. I walked in a bit ago to check the positioning.”

...Oh, so that’s why the boys bath grew so noisy a while back...

Horizon laid out her own futon behind the 5th Special Duty Officer’s.

“It is probably meaningless, but thinking of the battle formation here can be amusing.”

“Then maybe I’ll sleep here.”

Kimi laid out her futon behind Horizon’s. Asama sighed.

“Not again, Kimi...”

“Suzu! Suzu! We’re all sleeping over here, right? Futayo, you’ll be next to Horizon, right?”

“Eh?” said Suzu as she looked up, but she soon nodded. The Vice Chancellor did the same.

Instead, Asama spoke up after being skipped over.

“Eh? W-wait, Kimi.”

“What is it? Hmm? What – is – it?”

“Kh...!”

...Where is Asama-san’s clenched fist going to go?

But Kimi only slapped a hand on the futon she had laid out.

“This spot is for you, Asama. You can be with Suzu and me. Suzu, that’s fine, right?”

“Y-yes... You smell nice...Kimi-chan...and you’re...warm.”

Mary then raised her right hand. And she placed a hand on her blushing face while speaking to Horizon.

“Where is Master Tenzou?”

“Around B-3.”

“Is that a coordinate?” everyone muttered as Mary seemed to realize what that meant and moved her futon.

Asama suddenly looked up.

“North is...this way right now. Starboard. I think his head will be on this side.”

“Judge. Thank you very much.”

Mary set down her pillow, but after a moment moved it out of the way. Instead, she sat down there and spoke as if asking permission.

“...An air lap pillow?”

Mal-Ga: “Th-that one got me...! That hit me more than almost anything else in my short life...!”

Gold Mar: “Gh... L-look, Ga-chan, there’s a lap...a lap here too...”

Asama: “You two! The wound is still shallow, so try to fight it!”

Hori-ko: “As long as the coordinates line up, I can make an air *tsukkomi*, can’t I?”

Bell: “Is that...how it...works?”

Asama thought *I just saw something incredible* while she recalled the night before.

She had ended up sleeping alongside Toori and Horizon and they had ultimately created a bed fortress out of several people, but...

...Do Toori-kun and Horizon expect that from me...?

But if so, does that make Mito a dog?

“Hmm...”

She crossed her arms and groaned, but she was in the position Kimi had prepared for her.

She felt led there, but it was pathetic how little she intended to fight it.
However...

“...?”

Horizon bent back and beckoned Futayo over.

Futayo crouched down and erased her footsteps as she approached.

Everyone looked over curiously as Horizon whispered something to Futayo.

A moment later, Futayo slammed Tonbo Spare (which was only the main device since the extension device had been damaged in the Torahide battle) into the back of the clothes shelves. And the blade stabbed in up to the base.

“Eh?”

Just as everyone expressed their surprise, they heard something from the boys bath next door.

“Owaaaaaaaaaaaaahh!”

Horizon commented on the scream.

“So you failed to finish him off. I saw some light glinting from the back, so I thought it must be a peeping point. ...Oh, Suzu-sama, could you bring in some repair materials? There should be some left from repairing the Blue Thunder.”

That’s incredible... honestly thought Asama.

At that very moment, the divider at the girls bath’s entrance slid open.

“You moron! That was really dangerous, Horizon!”

The crossdresser charged in, wearing a yukata.

In Okutama’s underground, the delivery workers moving through the same long block as Suzu’s Bath saw someone fly out of the bathhouse’s entrance.

“A girl?” they asked as they continued their work. But when they realized the “girl” had been sent flying by the Muneshige Cannon, false arms, a spear, and milk bottles, they realized they were actually seeing a crossdresser.

“Okay. Let’s get these repair materials to Musashino.”

They got back to work while the crossdresser gathered up the various weapons and reentered the girls bath.

“Anyway, you need to think more about what you throw at me. Oh, Horizon, here’s the Muneo cannon. And, Asama, why do you have an arrow with a dulled point?”

Asama accepted the arrow and sighed.

“Because I could predict this would happen. And, Toori-kun, why are you crossdressing?”

“Well, if I’m going into the girls bath, I’ve gotta be a girl, right?”

It scared her that he kind of made sense to her. When she thought about it, Shinto mythology was a treasure trove of crossdressing material. *Fine, then*, she thought...

“You know? Some of the girls here are married or close enough, so please be more careful.”

“Married?”

The crossdresser looked over and saw Gin was already asleep with her false arms removed next to her. Perhaps for security purposes, an Arcabuz Cruz was floating close to the floor and aiming his way.

The weapon was taking this seriously, so Asama could tell it took Gin’s personality into account.

...I’m glad it didn’t fire just now.

Narumi was also already asleep, but she had a drawn mandible sword next to her futon.

It looked like she was prepared to join a battle at a moment’s notice.

...Our married girls are way too serious.

Oh, but they’re all people who joined us later on, she added for no real reason, but then the crossdresser suddenly looked in a different direction.

He looked to Mary.

She gave the crossdresser a quick bow. Immediately, Tenzou charged in through the entrance.

“Toori-dono! You mustn’t look at Mary-dono!”

In Okutama’s underground, the delivery workers moving through the same long block as Suzu’s Bath saw a ninja fly out of the bathhouse’s entrance.

But when they realized the ninja had been sent flying by the Muneshige Cannon, false arms, a spear, and milk bottles and when they saw Musashi’s princess’s arms scurry across the floor to collect those weapons, they realized what had happened.

“Okay. Let’s actually get these repair materials to Musashino this time.”

They got back to work while the crossdresser dragged the ninja, who was refusing to get up and pretending to cry, into the boys bath.

...So Tenzou-kun can actually express his jealousy now...

Asama sighed after confirming the crossdresser and the ninja had returned to the boys bath.

She spoke down toward her futon while watching Horizon return her arms to her shoulders.

“Honestly.”

Yoshiyasu and Ookubo were not here since they were not part of the study camp group, but Mary and the others were used to this sort of thing. She could only conclude it was far too late now, but she still spoke up.

“Toori-kun doesn’t give this kind of thing as much thought as he should. ...I mean, we’re about to go to sleep so none of us is wearing underwear.” She nodded and continued. “And I’m always telling him he can’t walk in or look at times like this.”

Kimi raised her hand. That made Asama think that girl’s presence may be to blame for how little thought he gave these things, but there was no helping that

at this point.

But if Kimi did have an excuse, she would hear it out.

“What is it, Kimi?”

“Judge. Is he not allowed to look because we aren’t wearing underwear?”

“Yes! You have to ask?”

“But by that logic, what about you, Asama? You’re a shrine maiden and never wear underwear, right? So can he never look at you? Isn’t that something of a double standard?”

Asama thought about that.

...Huh?

“...Now that you mention it, you’re right.”

“D-don’t give in so quickly, Asama-san!” insisted Adele.

Horizon nodded in agreement.

“Asama-sama loses one point.”

Some kind of special rules seemed to be in effect. But then Adele raised her hand.

“In a yukata, you can see through the gaps, right? And I’m short, so I can see a lot of gaps when I’m sitting down. Even now, I can sometimes see some things when someone bends over to grab something from the floor.”

Everyone adjusted their natural-looking movements. And...

“That’s right,” agreed Kimi. She embraced Suzu from behind as the girl quickly pulled her yukata together. “Futayo keeps her guard up. And she sits perfectly straight. Same for Mitotsudaira.”

“Masa-san sits more casually, but she still makes sure her knees are together.”

“And Ga-chan makes sure to fasten her yukata all the way down to the knees.”

“If I don’t do that, I just get lazier and lazier while seated and working. But if

you prefer it open, I can keep it open while at home.”

I see, thought Asama just before Adele looked her way.

“Asama-san, you’re pretty defenseless, aren’t you?”

“Wh-what does that mean!?”

That was not much of a protest, but Mary smiled bitterly at it.

“But, Lady Asama, you spoke with him like normal in your yukata earlier, didn’t you?”

“Eh? ...Y-yes. That’s because Toori-kun and I are used to it. I mean, he’ll flee to my place at night. We have a barrier in place, but my dad has given him a divine protection pass...”

After getting that far, Asama realized what she had said.

...Oh, no...!

Naruze expressionlessly raised her pen.

“You’re used to being defenseless? You accept him in at night?”

“N-no, wait...! Horizon, don’t do your ‘you thief’ bit with the futon!”

But she realized now how careless she had been.

“Look, look, Ga-chan. Asama-chi has a combing-her-memories-to-see-if-he-might-have-ever-seen-something look on her face.”

“That’s way too long! That adjective is way too long!”

But some of them were already whispering to each other. And that included Horizon.

“...She’s clearly let her guard down.”

“I’m starting to be more worried that she’ll attack the Chancellor than the other way around.”

“I’m not sure my foolish brother would think it was that big a deal if he did see something.”

“To sum up,” said Horizon. “Toori-sama and Asama-sama share a secret.”

...Ah.

Sharing or gaining a secret.

Kimi had mentioned that in the evening. But once again...

“I think Toori-sama peeped earlier because he wanted to share and gain a secret with me and everyone else.” Horizon looked to Asama. “But that has happened naturally with Asama-sama.”

“N-no, as Adele said, I’ve just been defenseless and I’m used to Toori-kun... Also, he comes to peep on my spring when other people are in it too.”

“Even if portions are the same, I have determined it is the differences that matter. After all, that is what determines the difference between his relationship with me and his relationship with Asama-sama.”

But...

“If our relationship ends, Toori-sama and I will have nothing anymore.”

“You’ll still have me.”

Kimi narrowed her eyes toward Horizon and opened her mouth.

She breathed a light sigh that was likely meant to express admiration.

She was probably delighted that Horizon could express so very much.

And then Kimi spoke to their princess with a smile in her voice.

“I will help my foolish brother live his life. And if he needs you, Horizon, then I will help you too. ...Same for the others.”

“Judge. Thank you very much. Also...”

Horizon looked to Asama and then to the others. She started to open her mouth, but...

...Honestly.

She is an idiot too, thought Asama.

She did not want to lose anything, she wanted to feel happy, and she wanted to be with as much as possible.

Did she realize that she was talking about so much more than usual today?
Asama then compared her own wishy-washiness to that girl.

“—————”

She sat on the futon behind Horizon. That also put her by his side, but that was her position in the battle formation.

She sat down and sighed. Then the others smiled.

“...Defenseless.”

“Ehh!? But I have my knees together!”

They all formed a seated scrum.

“Look, it’s due to the volume of her thighs...”

“An uncontainable body! ...That’s a great doujinshi tagline!”

“This is going to bug the hell out of her once she starts to notice it.”

After quickly adjusting her sitting position and the bottom of her yukata, Asama took another breath.

...They’re such strange people.

Narumi thought to herself while lying on her side and pretending to sleep with her back to them.

Musashi’s princess had spoken of forming a community that shared their destiny.

In a narrow view, that referred to a family. In a wider view, it referred to a clan or nation.

But instead of a group formed from mere circumstances, they were very close to each other.

...It’s a gathering where anyone’s prosperity leads to the prosperity of the whole.

They did not monopolize happiness; they shared it.

A powerful but fair patriarchal or matriarchal system was a representative

example of that. The Testament recorded such a system becoming official policy in the Far East.

Of course, that kind of system was a fundamental part of the Date and Mogami lands in the north because it was necessary for survival.

Mogami Yoshiaki and Ivan IV had used their authority to build up their lands and nations so that everyone with them benefited equally.

But Musashi's princess...

"...Nn."

Their will tickled at Narumi enough that she pretended to turn over in her sleep.

For their nation and their people, leaders would force their people to be the kind of "good citizens" they wanted.

Even a patriarch or matriarch with authority and control over the inheritance would want their family to be a "good family" for the survival and prosperity of the family.

But Musashi's princess and king were different.

They were not with the others for prosperity; they promised prosperity so the others would be with them.

It was the opposite.

The prosperity was only the means to an end, so they were backwards.

That king, princess, and all the others were backwards.

She had heard about their king from Kiyonari. Kiyonari had once said this about him: *...He will create a kingdom that can make everyone's dreams come true.*

That meant he would prepare a place for everyone.

But that king could not do anything on his own. That led the others to help out in making everyone's dreams come true, but the king and princess felt responsible for that.

...It's so silly.

But how had it been in Date?

Hadn't they driven Masamune into a corner in their search for a powerful leader?

If, instead of seeking strength from Masamune, everyone had wanted a home and path to follow, things might have turned out differently.

And as that silly thought came to mind...

...I've loosened up a lot, too.

At the moment, Date had dealt with all of its problems and everyone was happy. So if she was still wondering what other happiness there could have been or searching for hypothetical happiness, she had to have changed a lot.

But then she heard the others again.

"Narumi-san has remained surprisingly untouched, hasn't she?"

What?

"Now this I can't just ignore."

She got up and joined the conversation.

Asama sighed while everyone gathered around and created a lively atmosphere when they should have been sleeping.

She leaned back against the clothing shelves.

...What am I supposed to do about all this?

She felt like a great variety of emotions and paths were being created in quick succession lately, but she had no idea which ones to walk down and which ones to maintain the status quo on.

The real problem was Horizon saying they were welcome to join her. Asama tended not to act when she was given the right to choose.

So...

...Mito...

That girl had gone to get her luggage from her house and she had yet to arrive

here. As a knight, she must have had a lot of luggage.

At any rate, Asama considered dragging Mitotsudaira into this in order to distribute the damage between them. So she sent a divine transmission to the girl.

It rang for a few seconds before she answered.

“What is it?”

“Eh? Um, uh, Mito? We’re all having a lot of fun at Suzu-san’s place, so why don’t you hurry on over?”

“About that...”

“Is something wrong?” she asked and Mitotsudaira answered:

“My house was destroyed.”

Mitotsudaira faced the city of Musashino in the night.

That was where her house was located.

It was a small mansion-type house surrounded by a natural environment block. It had a garden and an enclosure. She was confident that it had a splendid exterior.

She had made a special effort to make sure it was sturdy, so the roof was made of hardened wood and the walls were plaster.

But there was one major problem.

“This is because of...that, isn’t it?”

Through the inward-opening entrance, the entire interior was destroyed.

Something had broken diagonally through the roof and ricocheted off the back wall and floor. It must have continued on to destroy all of the interior walls and furnishings.

The seven-room house was now just one big room.

As for why...

“That dragon...”

Or rather, one of his claws.

Six of the dragon's claws had been severed during the battle. She had used four of them, but one of the remaining two had flown here.

...What am I supposed to do about this?

I need to view this positively, thought Mitotsudaira. Insurance would probably cover this. And since she was a knight deployed from Hexagone Française, they would of course cover most of the repair expenses.

And starting tomorrow – or today really – they were leaving on their study camp. She was fairly certain workers could at least prepare the land in the two nights and three days, or one night and two days, that she was gone.

While there would not be a new house waiting for when she returned from the study camp, she would be able to live in an environment like that during summer break.

“That’s right.”

Stay positive, she told herself with a smile.

She had to prepare her luggage from the things inside. She was glad it was a solid house. The interior was destroyed, but the outside shape remained, making it easier to search through.

And then a voice called out to her from behind.

“Nate. Is your house okay?”

“My king?”

She turned around to find a yukata crossdresser. And once he realized she had seen him, he started running in a girly way.

She was not sure if she should thank him for running over or demand he leave, but behind him she saw Horizon, Asama, and the others in their summer uniforms.

Since their hair and skin looked refreshed and they smelled of soap, they must have taken a bath already. And if they were wearing their summer uniforms...

“...Sorry for worrying you. I even had you get dressed again, didn’t I?”

“No, no, Mitotsudaira-sama. Do not worry about it. That was due to Asama-sama’s defenselessness.”

“Defenselessness?”

The crossdresser looked back and Asama slapped a hand down on Horizon’s shoulder.

“Okay, okay. Let’s go over here for a lesson on common sense!”

Mitotsudaira had no idea what that was about, but at least they seemed to be getting along. But then the crossdresser arrived by her side.

“Nate, are the things inside okay?”

“Judge. The things in the back closet might not be, but I think everything in the corners and the basement should be fine.”

“I see...” The crossdresser sighed with a clear look of relief. “So the porn games I had hidden in your underground storage weren’t crushed.”

Horizon had walked over just in time for that one, so she and Mitotsudaira kicked him over into the wall.

And thanks to that shock...

“Ah.”

The surviving house fully collapsed.

Chapter 43: Shot One in the Water

第四十三章

『水場の被弾人』



思い出したかのように
大事な事は沸き上がる
配点（照れ隠し）

Important things well up

Like I just remembered them

Point Allocation (Hiding Your Embarrassment)

The morning wind blew through the forest.

It was an east wind passing through the bottom of a valley.

It was not a cool wind hanging around since the early summer predawn. This movement of air had begun to heat up, saying that the morning had begun.

And in addition to that wind...

“Kiyono-dono, the cicadas have started to cry.”

“Then let’s hurry this up so we can complete our quota, Fukushima-sama.”

Water splashed and spilled outside.

This happened on a Hashiba ironclad ship invading Mouri. On the far aft deck, the top of the cylindrical bridge had been modified into a terrace which had a wooden pool.

There were three people there: Kiyomasa, Fukushima, and...

“Katagiri-sama, this is for the history recreation, so you can get out right away if you want.”

Kiyomasa spoke to Katagiri who was answering test questions with a drawing board on the poolside. He wore a shirt and a string-tied boy’s swimsuit and his feet were soaking in the water, but...

“Thanks, but I’m fine. Taking my test here is a lot more relaxing, so I’m actually thankful.”

“That is true,” said Fukushima. “If I had known I could take the test in this environment, I would not have spent all last night reading through all of the textbooks...”

She was already soaking up to her shoulders in the water and she now stood up straight. She shook her body a bit and the water in her hair flew out into the

sunlight. Then she grabbed onto the poolside and pulled herself up.

“The view down below is nice.”

She narrowed her eyes toward the festival beginning on the deck.

After her, Kiyomasa also got up on the poolside, sat down, and looked back at the deck.

“This is an early history recreation for a portion of the Siege of Odawara, isn’t it? The first and second ships are damaged and they have stayed in their normal state for defense, but the rest of the ships are holding a festival for welfare purposes.”

Just like the attack on Mouri, Hashiba would use flooding to defeat Houjou at the Siege of Odawara. But while doing so, Hashiba would do something to show their opponents that their reserves were running out.

“We hold a festival and party within our formation.”

But preparing and deploying that took time.

So they would complete it in advance by doing it alongside the attack on Mouri. That would allow them to fulfill the conditions for the Siege of Odawara more swiftly, and...

“We need to be able to respond in time if Musashi heads to Houjou after their study camp,” said Fukushima.

“More importantly,” said Katagiri who approached them on the poolside while wearing a straw hat, presumably to keep the sunlight off his drawing board, and carrying a glass of water. He looked to the eastern sky. “Can the Azuchi not make it here?”

“It is approaching at low speed,” explained Fukushima as she too looked to the eastern sky where the giant ship was hazily visible in the blue distance.

She twisted around on the poolside and sighed toward the Azuchi.

“It is following behind us to ensure its safety. ...We cannot move our front line forward at the moment given the possibility of an attack from the enemy’s new type of artillery shell, so the Azuchi cannot move forward without running across the same problem.”

“That new shell is forcing us to change our basic anti-surface tactics, isn’t it?” asked Kiyomasa.

Fukushima nodded and Katagiri raised his hand.

“What is that exactly? I’d like to know our basic tactics, if possible...”

“Very well,” said Fukushima as she opened a *lernen figur*.

Kiyomasa saw Fukushima open a flat *lernen figur* over the pool.

The panel pictured a defensive fortress on the ground and attack aerial ships in the sky.

She explained the point of the anti-surface and anti-air diagram.

“In an anti-surface battle fought by aerial ships, thou must first consider the attacks that can hit thee from the surface.”

With that, an arrow appeared pointing from the surface fortress block and toward the air fleet.

The aerial forces approached the surface, but...

“As thou approach, the attacks from the surface will grow in density. Thus, an aerial force will position itself in a horizontal coordinate matching the fortress while using a vertical coordinate to remain in a diagonal position. That way it can stay within effective firing range while keeping as much distance as possible.”

Katagiri raised his hand.

“I’ve always had a question about that theory: Wouldn’t it be better to position yourself directly above and drop bombs or fire straight down?”

“Positioning thyself directly above means thou have come to a stop.”

Fukushima’s response was blunt, so Kiyomasa smiled bitterly.

...She makes it easy to understand, but she can be a bit decisive.

To help out, Kiyomasa turned toward Katagiri.

“If my Caledfwlch or a similar weapon is on the surface, coming to a stop in

the sky will get you immediately sunk. To avoid that, you want to keep moving while you attack and you want to attack from as close to a horizontal altitude as possible.”

“Why from close to a horizontal altitude?”

He was sharp.

...It's unusual for Katagiri-sama to be so interested in tactics.

“Fukushima-sama, let me do this.”

Kiyomasa got in the water and sent Fukushima a request. Fukushima nodded and a *lernen figur* saying “shared” appeared next to her face.

Kiyomasa then reached toward Fukushima’s *lernen figur*.

...I can control it now, can't I?

Kiyomasa turned the *lernen figur* toward Katagiri. She then placed an additional aerial force block at a point slightly above horizontal.

“This was the general situation when we faced Mouri the day before yesterday, but when the aerial force is at a nearly horizontal altitude, not all of the counterattacking ground force can fight back.”

It was obvious in visual form. An arrow was used to indicate anti-air fire rising from the surface base. As it grew more horizontal, it also grew skinnier.

“The surface artillery and other forces are located on the ground, so they’re arranged nearly horizontally. So if we are located low to the ground, they end up firing at a nearly horizontal angle and the more distant artillery can’t fire because the closer artillery, city, or fortress gets in the way.”

“Also, the enemy’s front line must choose between targeting our surface troops or our nearly horizontal aerial force. That was part of our strategy the day before yesterday. There were a lot of new warriors in the surface troops, so we wanted to divert some of the enemy artillery fire into the sky.”

“I see,” said Katagiri with a nod.

...Katagiri-sama can probably handle some additional information here.

Kiyomasa sent a rectangular block from the nearly horizontal aerial force and

toward the enemy ground forces.

“Hashiba-sama’s transport ship attack is an extension of the aerial force and also a means of gathering the enemy’s attention. As the transport ship could come from anywhere, the enemy must be prepared to aim their artillery and activate their defense barriers in every direction. That splits up the enemy artillery fire and applies pressure which wears them down, so it means a lot even if the transport ship attack does not do any direct damage,” explained Kiyomasa. “But Hexagone Française has developed a shell specialized for use against ships.”

She had seen it in person.

There were also images showing what had happened: The transport ship was pierced through the bow, but it burst and broke apart before it was fully penetrated.

“That attack was likely made by Isaac of the Three Musketeers. The effective range is 7km. ...Of course, its effective range drops to 2km using one of Hexagone Française’s god of war rifles.”

However...

“In Musashi’s battle against the Shirasagi Castle last night, their god of war achieved a range of approximately 20km. It is unknown if Hexagone Française has equivalent technology, but it would be best to assume they have similar abilities.”

“Couldn’t the Azuchi’s defense barriers handle a long range shot like that?”

“If it can survive a long range hit, then where would it be best to keep the Azuchi?”

Katagiri thought about that for a moment. And...

“...Ah.”

He looked to the Azuchi in the eastern sky.

He wrinkled his brow and looked at his reflection in the drawing board before speaking.

“We have to keep our distance and, even if we do fire from our aerial ships,

Mouri has middle gods of war for defense...”

“Testament. Hexagone Française’s strategy is clear,” said Fukushima. “They are preventing the Far East from using its aerial-ship-focused strategies.”

Kiyomasa nodded in agreement.

This was the answer that Takenaka and the other fighters had reached.

“According to the Testament, Hexagone Française will become the ruler of Europe. But Mouri will shrink. So Mouri has prepared a fighting force and tactics that allow them to fight back against the Far Eastern groups opposing them. That is what this is.”

“Then,” said Katagiri. “Will an invasion primarily using aerial ships not work?”

He adjusted his position on the western poolside so he was facing east.

Kiyomasa slowly treaded water over to him and held up Fukushima’s *lernen figur*.

“It is not impossible, but we have decided we don’t have to.”

Fukushima opened a *lernen figur* by her hand and used it to control the large one Kiyomasa was holding.

It displayed their current invasion route toward Paris.

And Kiyomasa asked Katagiri a question.

“Okay, Katagiri-sama, *if we are going to use the Azuchi now*, how do you think we should do it?”

“...Is that a trick question?”

“It could be depending on how you look at it,” answered Kiyomasa. “But you can find the answer in my question. I am saying we definitely will invade Mouri using the supposedly unusable Azuchi.”

Now.

“If it were up to you, Katagiri-sama, how would you use it?”

Katagiri thought about the question.

He was in charge of gathering diplomatic information, so he knew what the other nations were doing.

Takenaka would have used the information he released that morning to ask the opinions of the various departments and to decide what to do with the Azuchi.

...And Kiyomasa-san and Fukushima-san probably heard that from Takenaka-san.

He did not feel left out. They were combat personnel while he was in charge of diplomatic information.

And this was a battlefield. Since Kiyomasa was telling him about this, she must have gotten permission from Takenaka to share the information.

But, thought Katagiri. I am a diplomat.

He knew a bit about strategy, but he was a complete amateur compared to the two girls in front of him. He had just now revealed his ignorance concerning the use of aerial ships.

...I'm hopeless.

But even as he thought that...

"Testament," he said to Kiyomasa.

He was telling her he had a will of his own, so he could think about this and come up with an answer.

...I need to give it proper thought and give the best answer I can.

It was okay if he was wrong, so he would think it through.

...That's right.

When he had asked that shrine maiden how he could be manlier, she had told him to do his best when it came to the things he actually could do.

So he thought about it. How far could his diplomatic information carry him toward the right answer?

And he ignored the answer sheet on his drawing board. He placed his cokepen in the drawing board's latch and opened his mouth.

“I will say what I can using the process of elimination.”

...Oh?

Fukushima peered at Katagiri’s face while sitting on the poolside.

She sat on the southern side and Katagiri was on the western side. The sun was still in the east, so its light reflected off the pool and shined on his face from below.

His eyebrows were raised and he seemed deep in thought. But...

...That is a slight change.

Before, Katagiri would have been more honest.

If he had not known something, he would have immediately said so and asked for the answer.

But that was different now. He did not know, but he was thinking about it as best he could.

This silence gave him a chance to think, but it also made sure he did not act like he knew what he was talking about in front of the more knowledgeable girls. So when he did speak...

Llaf: “Kiyo-dono.”

Kiyo-Massive: “Eh? Oh, yes. What is it?”

Llaf: “Katagiri-dono has changed a little, don’t thou think?”

There was a pause of a few breaths before she received a response.

Kiyo-Massive: “Do I feel kind of disappointed because I like to act older than him?”

Kiyomasa gave her a nonchalant look accompanied by a self-deprecating smile.

Kiyo-Massive: “It’s a small change, but if it isn’t temporary and it’s going to stick around, then Katagiri-sama’s department should grow more proactive instead of just waiting for orders.”

Llaf: “That would be a wonderful thing.”

Once she sent that, Katagiri suddenly moved.

“First...”

His fingers pointed to the northeast and south of the diagram Kiyomasa was holding up.

“The best way I can think of using the Azuchi is to have it act independently of us in the main unit so it splits up the enemy.”

Katagiri simply spoke his thoughts in order to avoid allowing emotions to form in him.

“The enemy’s tactics primarily use gods of war. But using a god of war force requires putting together a unit of a decent size. So if we split up the enemy, they won’t be able to use their god of war forces as effectively.”

Kiyomasa moved in response to his words.

She silently turned toward Fukushima on the poolside to her right.

“I see,” began Fukushima.

She prepared to say more, but Katagiri moved before she could.

He raised his right hand so she could see and then he spoke.

“But...that is unfortunately not possible.”

Katagiri spoke to the two girls.

“We unfortunately cannot use the Azuchi as a diversion to split up the enemy.”

He knew the reason why. It had been in the information he had compiled last night.

“There is a reason for that.” He opened a map of Hexagone Française and placed his hand on the south end. “Partially because we have support from allied K.P.A. Italia, there was a time when we thought it would be safer to have

the Azuchi invade from the south.”

But...

“After negotiating with K.P.A. Italia in advance, their commerce cities said they would provide materiel support instead of allowing the Azuchi through.”

“What does that mean?”

Fukushima’s question told him he was on the right track. Most likely, Takenaka had told them her decision but had not given her reasoning why.

So Katagiri said, “K.P.A. Italia is a joint nation of cities. Each city is a commerce city and, even while K.P.A. Italia is conquered by M.H.R.R., they continue to trade with other nations. They do business with Hexagone Française and its associated nations. And that includes nations that continue to oppose Hashiba-sama and M.H.R.R. ...There is no way they can allow the Azuchi through.”

“And that’s why they provided support instead?” asked Kiyomasa.

“Testament. The ether fuel shared using the ley line divine transmissions is the result of that. K.P.A. Italia can be seen as the Catholic headquarters, so they are rich with Blessings. As long as we can secure a line, we can continue the invasion without worrying.”

“But,” said a voice.

It was Fukushima.

She rubbed her own right arm and grabbed her elbow.

There was a white scar there. That was...

...A wound from the Battle of Novgorod.

Fukushima had broken her elbow during her duel with Musashi’s Vice Chancellor below Novgorod. She had undergone emergency treatment to recover before they started for Edo, but the scar showed up in the sun.

It either still felt odd to her or she had just remembered it was visible. Either way, she bent and straightened her elbow before placing it in the water. And...

“Is it impossible to have the Azuchi invade via a different route?”

Kiyomasa mentally smiled at Fukushima's question.

Takenaka had decided on the Azuchi's future actions that morning. Fukushima had joined them for that purpose, but...

...I guess she still can't quite accept it.

She had been summoned from Edo as the Azuchi's temporary castle keeper. And she had been forced to abandon Takigawa for it. Fukushima probably wanted to defeat Mouri and return to Kantou as soon as possible.

As for Kiyomasa...

...I'm worried about what will happen at Sanada's ruins.

She could guess they were all worried about that.

But Takenaka had stopped them from doing that and she would not say much about the decision.

Fukushima's demand of Katagiri was fueled by her anger over the current situation.

And Katagiri responded.

He pointed to the northeast of the Hexagone Française map by his hands.

"A secondary invasion route for the Azuchi would be to come from the northeast. We are arriving from the central east, but if the Azuchi follows us along a parallel path from the northeast, it should be able to rejoin us once we cross the central mountains and pass through the north of the forested region."

"That is true enough."

That likely meant Fukushima had also considered this route.

Kiyomasa opened a space for her as she got in the water and slowly approached.

With Katagiri on the poolside between them, Fukushima sat on his left and Kiyomasa on his right.

They then tried to view his *lernen figur* from either side, so he increased its size and turned it toward them.

“Now, about this northern route.” He produced a long-distance image. “Just between us, the Protestants of northern M.H.R.R. are gathering on the southern border.”

The image showed a hill. The light-amplified slope showed rows of mobile shells dressed in black, which signified the M.H.R.R. Protestants.

They belonged to the Protestant corporation named Eisenritter, so they had thick armor.

“...Is that the Magdeburg region?”

“Testament. Shibata-sama entered from the southeast as a diversion, but only the provisional border guards responded. The Protestants’ main force includes mobile cannons and aerial ships and they’re moving south from west of Magdeburg. And it seems...”

“It seems?”

“Holland’s forces have joined them.”

“Why?” asked Fukushima. “I thought Holland’s Resistance Chancellor William, Prince of Orange, was taken by the Princess Disappearances at Novgorod.”

“Testament. That creates a dangerous situation for Holland since they are still fighting España. But...”

Katagiri opened two new images.

One was a long-distance image of a fleet traveling west over the ocean.

The other was a long-distance image of an aerial fleet stopping at a tall metal tower above the waiting Protestant forces.

And Kiyomasa tilted her head upon seeing the shapes of the ships in the first image.

“Is this a Sviet Rus fleet...?”

Kiyomasa questioned the westward travel of the Sviet Rus fleet.

...What is this?

It was not that odd for a Sviet Rus fleet to be on the move.

But something felt off to her. And she realized why:

“...Over the ocean?”

The ocean bordered Sviet Rus to the north. So their fleet should have been traveling toward Shibata’s forces to the southwest or Oushuu to the east.

So why were they traveling over the ocean?

Katagiri nodded and opened his mouth.

“Sviet Rus used the Novgorod battle to prove their ‘friendship with England’ by escorting the English ships from the North Sea to Dover.”

“In that case,” said Fukushima. Kiyomasa turned toward her and saw she had grabbed the two *lernen figur* that Katagiri had opened and turned them toward herself.

Fukushima then looked at both the fleet in the one image and the ships floating above the Protestant forces in the other.

“This is an English fleet...”

“Testament.” Katagiri nodded at Fukushima and then at Kiyomasa too. “ ‘In order to welcome back the group that intervened in the Battle of Novgorod’, England’s Trumps #4, Howard, took a fleet to Holland. ...Howard’s fleet was originally purchased from Holland, so we are speculating that it was lent to Holland.”

And...

“Holland has temporarily given England the right to run their academy.”

“_____”

There was no point in asking “why”.

Holland was currently fighting for its independence.

Its opponents were Belgium, which was split off from Holland, and España, which originally owned Holland.

Holland was being protected by their fellow Protestants in the northern

German principalities and by...

“England is effectively their greatest supporter.”

If England had Sviet Rus as the guardians of the North Sea, then Holland would be protected from the north by the two powerful nations of England and Sviet Rus. And on land...

“If England provides a portion of the English fleet, which survived the Armada battle unscathed...”

Most likely...

“The Prince of Orange himself may have made a deal with England about temporarily loaning out their authority, just in case.”

“I really am thankful,” said a man in a straw hat in front of a sunflower bed.

Next to him, a young man lay collapsed on the rush mat laid out to the side of the flower bed. He spoke below the handkerchief covering his face.

“Thankful for what, Chancellor Segundo?”

“Are you sure you should be talking, Valdés? Even a pitcher shouldn’t stay out in the sun for long periods of time.”

“Well, I didn’t expect the work to last so long. I admire Lady Juana’s determination.”

“That’s because Juana manages her health flawlessly.”

“She doesn’t even let herself get tanned, so she really doesn’t overlook a single thing.”

That voice from the other side of the flower bed came from the Valdés Sister. She could be heard pulling weeds as she continued.

“My brother doesn’t matter, but what is it you’re thankful for?”

“Oh, that England has begun to get involved with Holland.”

Meaning...

“England is taking a new action. Instead of harassing us in Tres España,

they're moving on to their next international strategy."

"So...?"

"It means the Armada battle is well and truly over."

"...Chancellor, does that mean we can finally relax?"

"I'm not so sure. I bet Juana will be delighted, though. With all the related nations moving on from the Armada battle, we only really have to worry about our domestic issues. ...And with Juana's management skill and the expectation that brings, she can gain recovery support from Cortés of our Representative Council. ...The main problem is Hashiba once they finish their battle with Mouri, but our Tres España side is overwhelmingly superior to our Oouchi forces, so we need to focus on avoiding Hashiba. I will have Juana come up with a countermeasure. So, in a way, our relationship with Hexagone Française is going to be important..."

Segundo sat on the edge of the flower bed and reached for the water jug next to him.

He gulped some water into his belly and took a breath.

"It's time we started thinking about Westphalia."

"But, Chancellor, isn't that where Holland gets their independence from us?"

"That's why we need to think about it. ...We need to figure out how to become the finalists who turn everything around with a last-minute homerun. Thankfully, my research shows we have plenty of material with which to do that."

Someone approached from the hospital building to the south.

It was Juana. She adjusted her straw hat while raising a basket in her right hand.

"4th Special Duty Officer? This is supposed to be a rest day, so you're making a poor example getting heat stroke out here. I brought recovery spell drinks and charms."

"You're pathetic, brother."

“Sister, experience is everything. And your brother just gained more experience than you, so do not forget that I have won this round.”

“Lady Juana, I think I can do without that experience, so please give me some water.”

“Yes, yes,” said Juana, but she walked over to Segundo and the Valdés Brother first.

And as she passed the basket to Segundo, she suddenly looked to the flower bed.

“The buds have really grown, Chancellor.”

“That’s because you’ve taken such good care of them, Juana.”

“No, no.” A smile escaped onto Juana’s lips. “You are the one who sowed the seeds and looked after them all on your own until they budded.”

“It is still unknown whether or not England has joined Holland. But the movements of this aerial fleet and the fact that Tres España has ceased interfering with Holland let us make a pretty good guess.”

Kiyomasa listened to Katagiri while sitting on the poolside.

He continued speaking as if he had not noticed Fukushima sitting on his other side.

“If we have the Azuchi invade from Hexagone Française’s northeast, there is a chance the Protestants will intervene. And even if we do not, the Protestants are probably monitoring the Azuchi’s movements. After all...”

“After all?”

When she urged him on, Katagiri nodded without looking her way. He then pointed to a certain region of northern Hexagone Française.

“IZUMO is here. IZUMO supplies England with its floating technology and other technological products and it is on friendly terms with England. Plus, if Hexagone Française is attacked now, IZUMO might hire a force hostile to M.H.R.R. to protect them.”

“Are you suggesting they would hire England?”

“Either England or a related nation. ...One of the victors at Westphalia. When England takes action, it’s possible that we will also see movement from the nations with a connection to Hexagone Française, England, and Musashi, or that want to make sure those nations owe them a favor,” explained Katagiri. “So we cannot provoke northeast or north Hexagone Française. Which means...”

“Which means?”

Kiyomasa narrowed her eyes and looked to Katagiri.

...This is where his real argument begins.

The Azuchi could not invade from the north or south, so it was forced to follow this invasion route. And the enemy had a fighting force and tactics capable of holding back an aerial force.

But Takenaka had concluded they *could* use the Azuchi.

So how were they to use it?

Katagiri looked to the shallow part of the eastern sky. Even from here, those six ships looked like distant mountains.

“The Azuchi can’t be moved ahead of us, so it will be preserved. Even if it is loaded with materials for the flooding, it can’t move out ahead.”

Katagiri raised his right hand and pointed to the south of the Hexagone Française map.

He indicated the mountains they had passed through and raised his eyebrows.

“The transport ships loaded with support materiel from K.P.A. Italia are currently circling around from the east, just like the Azuchi.”

This was information held by Katagiri as their diplomat.

“With the Azuchi and the arriving transport ships, we can use a certain strategy against Hexagone Française.”

He moved his hand.

His slender fingers hesitated a few times over the map of Hexagone Française,

but he finally settled on three points between the entrance to the central plain and Paris in the north. They indicated...

“Bases.”

Neither Kiyomasa nor Fukushima said a word. They simply waited for him to speak.

He breathed in once and continued.

“To avoid the enemy gods of war and other attacks, we do not have the time or preparation to conquer the cities. So we will quickly cross Hexagone Française’s countryside. However, we need bases to establish a supply line to support that. But as things are, a base simply made by gathering transport ships might not be able to defend against enemy attack and we would be in trouble if one of the bases was destroyed.”

“Why is that?” asked Fukushima.

“After the attack on Mouri, we head back in the Great Return. If our bases are destroyed, we will have difficulty doing that.” He looked to the east. “So instead of using transport ships, we place the Azuchi across Hexagone Française as the bases we need. We use the Azuchi’s ships as defense-focused supply line bases and use the K.P.A. Italia transport ships to travel between them. ...Is that how Takenaka-san decided to ‘use the Azuchi’?”

“Have you, um, c-completed your plan, Takenaka-san?”

A quiet voice spoke in a wood-floored hall that smelled of food.

It was the dining hall within an ironclad ship.

There were few people in the dining hall due to the festival underway up on the deck. But those who were there turned toward the voice, bowed their heads, and took a step back.

It was a girl in a monkey-mask hat. And someone spoke to her.

“Oh, Hashiba-kun. ...How are you feeling?”

“Oh, quite good. I got a new part from the Azuchi.”

Hashiba circled to the foot of the table at which Takenaka sat while opening and closing her left hand. That white hand was a prosthetic.

When Takenaka saw the movement, she pulled out the seat next to her and gestured Hashiba toward it. And...

“Are you not heading up top?”

“Eh? Oh, no. if I go out in the sun immediately after maintenance, the standard temperature won’t set right.”

Nari Nari Nari: “Please take care of your body, Hashiba-sama. The decisive battle is coming soon.”

Hashiba nodded toward the *lernen figur* that appeared next to her face.

“Mi-chan, that would be a lot of trouble for you, wouldn’t it?”

Nari Nari Nari: “That is not what I meant. I should not have said anything.”

“If she’s worried, she should just say so,” said Takenaka with a bitter smile and a stretch. Then she tossed a *lernen figur* to Hashiba. “This is what I sent you a divine mail about this morning, but I think it’ll more or less work.”

“Wah, testament. Thank you very much.”

“No, no. This was thanks to those two.”

Takenaka gestured toward the black and gold wings sleeping while facing each other at a table in the center of the dining hall.

“Before dawn, they made a vertical ascent to extreme high altitude and got the visual data we needed, so now we know the actual locations of the cities.”

Takenaka leaned back a bit in her chair and lowered her arms on either side. Her shoulders relaxed.

“This has let me put together a plan for the race to Paris and the Great Return afterwards, but prepare yourself, Hashiba-kun.”

“For what?”

“The real battle with Hexagone Française will probably be at Paris...or rather, at Bitchu Takamatsu Castle.”

“I am aware of that.”

“No, you really aren’t.” Takenaka laughed. And, “Something incredible is going to happen in a day or two, but I won’t say anything more since there’s nothing we can do about it. At any rate, we need to focus on getting to Paris.”

“Is that so?” asked Hashiba as Takenaka held out her left hand.

“Tart.”

“Huh?”

“Kiyo-chan gave me one last night, but it all went to my brain and I don’t remember what it tasted like. I’m going to eat one and then go to sleep, so... tart.”

“I see.”

Hashiba got up and walked to the counter. Everyone at the counter quickly bowed and respectfully moved away when they noticed her.

Takenaka muttered to herself as she watched.

“Oh, I need to thank Katagiri-kun too...”

Katagiri listened to Kiyomasa and Fukushima describe the strategy that Takenaka had told them that morning.

A lot of it was the same as what he had just said.

...Good.

Now he did not feel inferior to the girls on either side of him. He wondered if it was childish to feel happy about that, but...

...I started with thinking about what I could do.

He had done just what that Asama shrine maiden had told him the night before.

“Yes.”

“Hm? Yes what, Katagiri-sama?”

His heart filled with panic when he heard Kiyomasa’s question from the left.

That was something only he and that shrine maiden knew about and he felt like Kiyomasa was asking about that memory.

So he quickly shook his head.

“No, um, I was just satisfied with my test answers.”

“Hee hee. You’re so silly, Katagiri-sama.”

Did she laugh because she realized he was lying?

But he was thankful she did not ask further questions.

Then Fukushima got up from where she sat to the right.

“Kiyo-dono, Takenaka-sama sent me the version of her instructions from this morning.”

Fukushima lightly tapped her *lernen figur*. That action produced a folder by her hands. It bore a cross emblem and she prepared to pass it to Kiyomasa.

Kiyomasa stood up from where she sat to the left and she opened a divine mail *lernen figur* in preparation to receive the folder. But because they looked aside and because their timing did not quite match up...

“Ah.”

The two of them collided chest-first over Katagiri’s head.

“Ow, ow ow.”

They held their noses and stepped back, but Kiyomasa smiled a little.

“Was that the Giant Breasts Defense?”

“I am not sure how to master that one,” said Fukushima.

“That’s a real technique...?” asked Katagiri.

I really don’t get these combat types, he thought before recalling the night before.

He remembered the Asama shrine maiden he had spoken with over divine transmission. Her chest had been fairly large, but...

...Could her breasts do that, too?

He pictured the light pink chest cloth in the close-up shots. The lips speaking to him had also been colored light pink by lipstick.

But his memories were not all that certain. That was because he had been more focused on her words than the image. So...

“Hee hee. Is this how the Giant Breasts Defense works?”

To his left, Kiyomasa demonstrated for Fukushima who was tilting her head with a hand on her chin.

And when Katagiri saw the transforming shape of her chest armor...

...No, I think the transformation last night applied more pressure from the left and right.

But then he snapped out of his sommelier reverie.

“Waaaaaahh!!”

Fukushima saw Katagiri throw away his drawing board and suddenly plunge into the water.

She looked to Kiyomasa because it happened without warning, but the other girl was only lifting up her chest armor. Kiyomasa, however, looked to their surroundings. In other words...

...A sniper!?

Fukushima looked down into the pool where Katagiri was quickly swimming to the opposite side.

He was moving away from them.

...That means...

Fukushima turned back toward the bow.

When Kiyomasa nodded her way and got up, she activated her acceleration spell: Headfirst Fall.

With her knee lifted into the air, she leaped to the edge of the poolside. On the way, she grabbed Ichinotani which she had left by the pool.

“Enemy attack!!”

By the time she shouted to everyone at the festival down below, Kiyomasa was alongside her, wielding Caledfwlch.

And everyone within earshot looked up their way.

They had everyone’s attention. The boys clasped their hands to praise them, but there seemed to be more for Kiyomasa. *Is that due to her superior skill with the Huge Breasts Defense?* At any rate...

“Katagiri-dono was hit by a sniper!”

“Ehhh!?”

Katagiri’s head was sticking out from the pool’s surface and he realized things were developing without him.

...D-do you mind if I have a word!?

He tried to tell them they had it wrong.

...It wasn’t a sniper! It was boobs!

But as he tried to say that and reached a hand out, he saw Fukushima standing on the poolside and speaking to everyone on the deck.

“The enemy might be dead ahead!”

Well, yes, Paris is that way, so you may not be wrong about that, thought Katagiri.

There might indeed be an enemy beyond the valley path ahead of them. So...

“Be on your guard so that Katagiri-dono’s sacrifice was not in vain!”

...But you are wrong about that part!!

He knew he could not let this continue, but he heard a cheer from the deck.

“They targeted Katagiri-sama!? The A.H.R.S. Novel Research Club, Oiran Spiegel, will not let them get away with this!”

“Indeed! Katagiri-sama is the idol of our A.H.R.S. Ukemi Research Club, Accidental Exertion!”

“No, if you wish to tell tales of Katagiri-sama’s greatness, leave it to us in the Storytelling Club, C’mon Long Life!”

He felt like an unpleasant reality was quickly bubbling to the surface.

...How does everyone view me...?

It was an unusual situation to be in while treading water in a pool with no one looking in your direction. But...

“Um.”

He knew it would be dangerous to let the warriors take action, so he spoke to the two girls in front of him.

When he did, Fukushima and Kiyomasa looked back.

“Katagiri-dono!?”

“Katagiri-sama!?”

“Um, uh...”

But just as he tried to say it was a misunderstanding...

...Eh!?

Something shot rapidly between those two and over his head.

It was...

“...!?”

It looked like the pool’s water had lowered by a few centimeters.

The water’s surface burst and Katagiri was slammed into the water.

...Artillery!?

There was one thing he could tell from the bottom of the water and that was exactly what Fukushima shouted loud enough to reach him through the water.

“Dead ahead! ...A god of war is firing on us!!”

The enemy had arrived.

They were quite large.

Hashiba's invading fleet was travelling in a column and some sudden figures appeared on the very first ship.

They were gods of war. The silver charger models had aerial combat wings equipped.

"It's the Hexagone Française *Lourd de Marionnette* knights!"

Also, they each had a red flag on their left shoulder. That meant...

"They're the ace numbers of the royal guards! They hold the 10-20th positions!"

That put them at the level of a Special Duty Officer. And they actually had the rank of knight. A group of two had flown rather than soared in from the sky.

It was too late to intercept them because they performed the charge from impossibly close range.

Defense barriers opened in an attempt to stop them, but...

"Incoming shellfire!"

A series of shells arrived from the supposedly empty area of sky dead ahead and they destroyed the defense barriers.

Then the Hexagone Française gods of war arrived as if splitting apart the shattering light and the satisfying sound.

They landed.

They were on the deck of the first ship.

They both maintained the momentum of their charge and flapped their wings to propel themselves forward.

They repeatedly fired the long cannons held below an arm and rapidly traversed the column of eight ships.

Chapter 44: Front and Back Ones of the Festival Stands

第四十四章

『祭屋台の前後者』



燻って上がり
しかし花火のようには咲かないもの
配点 (未熟)

It smolders and rises

But it does not blossom like fireworks

Point Allocation (Inexperience)

The two gods of war advanced.

Oda's ironclad ships were galleys, so the top deck was nearly flat and quite long.

There was a ram and two main cannons on the bow, so the bow was slightly raised. That meant there were no forward-facing cannons on the deck and they instead used turretless homing cannons on the left and right instead.

The two gods of war flew along the deck, placing them between those.

They used the four wings on their backs to maintain their speed along the port and starboard side of the first ship.

Their weapons were many. A long cannon was held below each arm and attached to the god of war hard points on their sides and a long spear was attached to each hip. And the shoulder hard points held...

"Autonomous shields...!?"

Someone on the deck who held an anti-god of war rifle clicked their tongue.

When they targeted the upper body of the gods of war, the shields automatically moved and sparks flew. And if they targeted lower down...

"The waist armor is the same...!?"

Sparks blossomed from the armor that opened up like a crustacean's legs but also like a bird's wings. And when the inertia of the shields' weight threatened to swing the two gods of war around...

"...!"

...they danced.

They whirled around and moved their wings to balance themselves and they continued forward while...

“Incoming fire!”

...attacking.

They fired the cannons below their arms separately in order to balance themselves.

The sparking gods of war launched cannon fire within their gentle spin.

The cannon fire followed their rotation and it pierced something: the turretless cannons positioned on the left and right of the deck.

While their rapid-fire raced out, their giant metal heels scraped at the deck, leaving a mark behind them. Their weapons roared over and over as they leaned toward the center of the deck and crossed paths there.

In that instant, the cannons on their sides flipped upwards. The hard point latches loosened and they circled from the sides to the top of the shoulders and to their backs.

“———!”

There the cannons stopped. The magazines were sticking out from the midpoint and that action caused them to come out and fly into the air.

All the while, the gods of war continued spinning. They instantly slammed in a new magazine.

At the same time, an M.H.R.R. boy standing atop the bridge waved his hand forward. He wore the epaulette of the ship’s captain and he raised both his eyebrows and his voice.

“Fire...!”

Shellfire flew toward the gods of war.

But the captain’s order had not been directed at his own ship and it was not his ship which had launched the shells.

The second ship behind them had increased its altitude and the main cannons on its bow were targeting the first ship’s deck.

“Don’t worry about us!!”

His decision led the second ship to fire its cannons.

The air shook, everything shimmered as if from heat, and two high-speed attacks were launched.

They targeted the two gods of war crossing paths at the center of the first ship's deck.

The gods of war were moving quickly, so the two shots were launched along their predicted trajectory.

But the gods of war did not stop.

The four wings on their backs detonated the air and they leaped and spun diagonally forward.

The flying shells had already broken the sound barrier and were surrounded by a transparent vacuum.

"Hit them...!"

The soundless attacks were pushed on by the captain's voice as he endured the great wind they whipped up.

The two shots flew straight toward the two gods of war.

But just before they hit, the two separating machines did something.

They each grabbed the other's hand with the hand rotating toward the center of the ship.

The sound of straining metal told just how firm their grip was.

One pulled on the other and the other simply raced forward. Their respective forces affected each other, so...

"...!"

The two spun as a single pair.

And just as the shells passed by their sides, they let go of each other.

Then the two separated to the left and right. The passing shells collided with the first ship's bow from behind.

Destruction followed.

The two main cannons on the bow were broken and the impact reached the

ammunition stored below.

It exploded. But two things happened before that light flashed and the ship shook.

The gods of war leaping toward the port and starboard edges moved their back wings just before colliding with the turretless cannons.

Wind exploded behind the silver giants.

Immediately afterwards, the soundless attacks reached the bow.

As a harbinger of the shockwaves from the resultant explosions, a ripple of dust spread out and the air cooled.

“Take cover...!”

The double shockwaves swept across the deck.

But the gods of war moved even faster and outraced that wave.

There were no more enemy attacks as far as they were concerned, so their shields made no autonomous movements.

And that made them more nimble. So...

“————”

The two gods of war raced forward as if to surpass and be surpassed by the gap between soundless and deafening.

They ran to the stern and the right god of war changed its route.

It glided down the center of the ship.

It then drew the long spear on its left hip and raised it. From there, it was a series of movements unique to a well-trained warrior.

“One down.”

It slammed the long spear into the bridge on the stern.

Then the two gods of war flew.

They soared up to the ascended bow of the second ship so they could race down the next deck.

Fukushima sped up.

Still in her swimsuit, she ran through the festival being held on the seventh ship.

She passed between the students, the items for sale, and the stands while accelerating with Headfirst Fall and facing forward.

She viewed her route through the gaps between people.

...There!

She saw a path she could pass through and she saw something deep in the valley of the crowd.

“Is that them...!?”

She caught a glimpse of two silver machines flying from the first ship to the second ship.

The din of metallic destruction left the first ship, traveled through the air, and reached her ears.

The bow had been shot.

If she hurried from here, she would make it in time for the fourth ship. So...

...If I hurry even more, I can make it in time for the third ship!

She gave a yell to accomplish that.

“No one move!”

Instead of just reaching them, the dignified ring of her voice resonated in the people. That overpowering ring caused them all to tremble and come to a stop, but Fukushima did not bother confirming the result.

She was already slipping through the gaps in the crowd.

“Headfirst Fall...!”

Her repeated accelerations and spinning body raced through the festival at full speed. Her movement took the form of consecutive gentle curves that seemed to slide past everything.

Each time she swung her body to the left or right, she accelerated and built momentum, but she still had a thought.

...This is nowhere near enough!

She immediately recalled her defeat and injury at Novgorod. That memory was still fresh in her body. It was strong enough that she could reproduce her movements from then and reaffirm her loss.

“Kh...!”

She arrived at the bow, but she needed height to clear the gap between ships.

...This distance...

There were a few dozen meters between the ships.

...Musashi's Vice Chancellor would clear it with ease...!

“Kiyo-dono!”

“Testament!”

Fukushima leaped without looking back to the responding voice.

Roofs were lined up on either side of the festival and she chose one side for her running start.

She used the left and Kiyomasa used the right.

She raced forward and made a great leap when the roofs came to an end.

She was moving in a straight line, but she placed Headfirst Fall's acceleration on her leading left shoulder.

“Go...!”

She used the base of one of the bow's cannons for her next foothold and then she leaped toward the sixth ship.

Kiyomasa thought to herself while running and jumping to the sixth and then fifth ship.

...Fukushima-sama?

She sensed something in the other girl's actions that prevented her from looking back at Kiyomasa.

There was something like desperation and impatience in her.

But Kiyomasa felt something like understanding toward Fukushima.

I might just be imagining it, she began.

...But this is due to her duel with Musashi's Vice Chancellor, isn't it?

She had lost at Novgorod. She had clashed with Musashi's Vice Chancellor and ultimately failed to endure it.

She had not said much about it, but the scrapes and cuts on Ichinotani's shaft made it clear just how intense a battle it had been.

The battle at Mito had been nothing in comparison.

That reminded Kiyomasa of another memory.

When Fukushima had faced Musashi's Vice Chancellor at Mito, she had been disappointed that her opponent had not been in top form.

But Musashi's Vice Chancellor must have been fighting seriously at Novgorod.

"However..."

That enemy had surpassed Fukushima's expectations at Novgorod.

Kiyomasa understood that from what she had heard from others.

For example, the battle with Shibata Katsuie, M.H.R.R.'s Vice Chancellor.

At Magdeburg in the battle preceding Mikatagahara, Musashi's Vice Chancellor had fought Shibata and remained entirely focused on defense. And she had then driven him back with the help of others.

But at Novgorod, she had fought on the same level as Shibata, even if he had been missing an arm at the time.

Importantly, she had been on the same level in more than just skill with a blade.

She had held her own against Shibata with footwork, martial arts, and the struggle over the most advantageous position.

Something about her must have changed between Mito and Novgorod.

Was it training, an insight, or some other way of strengthening herself? Whatever it was, something had quickly increased her skill.

And that was why Fukushima felt so much regret.

At Mito, she had been forced to defeat an opponent who was not in top form.

At Novgorod, she had failed to judge her opponent's skill and been defeated due to lack of preparation.

She and her opponent each had one win and one loss, but there was a large difference between the two.

Fukushima had been surpassed.

So she felt regret and it showed through in her actions.

Fukushima would not look back at Kiyomasa right now. She simply moved ever forward, as if driven by impatience.

Their view opened up as they reached the fifth ship's bow.

"Toh."

They leaped toward the fourth ship.

Fukushima made the jump and did not look back.

...Testament.

That is fine, thought Kiyomasa.

Kiyomasa had also lost.

If Fukushima would not look back while out in front, she could be the same.

"Fukushima-sama."

She had no idea if Fukushima could hear her.

"I will be moving out ahead."

Kiyomasa accelerated using the Caledfwlch pair she held below her arms.

"Finish this. ...Caledfwlch!"

“Hey.”

The forest’s branches surrounded the sky in a wide open space.

It was a large hall. But what looked like a floor was dirt and what looked like walls was a domed ceiling.

The ceiling was missing its center and the trees beyond masked the morning sunlight.

“Hey.”

A voice spoke once more. It belonged to a black dragon sitting in the center of the large hall.

His giant body occupied a fifth of the hall and he looked to the hole in the back wall which led underground.

A white dragon stood at that entrance to the underground.

“Hey.”

The black dragon called out again and the white dragon looked back.

“What is it, Saizou? Are you afraid to be left alone?”

“Is that anything to say to a Celestial Dragon...?” Saizou breathed a glowing sigh before continuing. “Sasuke...what do you think about Torahide losing?”

“He was truly freed from the bonds of eight hundred years ago and four hundred years ago. Torahide was never really satisfied back when Sakai was here. In a way, we should thank those Musashi students.”

“So what’s going to happen to us?”

“We’ll know in a day or two. ...Of course, it’s because we can’t make a prediction as short-term as that that we fell behind in Europe but also had such an enjoyable time with Sakai and the others.”

“They certainly were entertaining. I wonder if he’ll be coming down here.”

“Oh, I’m sure he will, but he won’t come here quite yet. ...He mentioned it the night before last.”

Mentioned what?

“The place we once guided him to.”

“We still have no idea what it is, do we?”

“Originally, it was definitely nothing more than ruins. But things changed after that man showed up thirty-odd years ago. ...That man who could speak on our level and investigated so very many things.” There was a nostalgic ring to Sasuke’s voice. “Matsudaira Motonobu. ...We could feel it through the ley lines when that nuisance of a man met his end.”

“Enough reminiscing,” said Saizou with a bitter smile.

And then...

“Teachers.”

They heard a voice from behind.

A large man had followed them through the entrance and entered the light of the hall.

He wore a Far Eastern summer uniform modified to look like a Buddhist priest. He himself was a demonic long-lived man. He waved his tattooed right arm.

“Unneeded #3, Miyoshi Seikai, here. I am about to leave Sanada.”

While waiting at the entrance to the underground, Sasuke relaxed his front shoulders and asked a question.

“What about *him*?”

“Eh? Oh, if you mean our great teacher, he left as soon as he heard about Isa from Anayama.”

“That sounds like him. ...Did he say anything about Isa?”

“That she ‘did well’.”

“Oh?” Saizou slowed his walking pace somewhat. “Isa must be rejoicing in the afterlife. ...So where was he headed?”

“Testament. He said he was going to make up for Isa’s and our regrets.”

“Musashi? ...No, I suppose not. He tends not to look at the ‘present’. In that

case...”

Sasuke spoke the location with some stiffness in his tone.

“Hexagone Française. ...The land in which we fought so fiercely.”

They met the enemy at the back of the third ship.

The third ship’s deck was set up for the festival which had slowed the two gods of war a little, but the delay was mostly thanks to the Caledfwlch attack that Kiyomasa had made after pulling out ahead of Fukushima halfway across the fourth ship.

Just as the two gods of war had tried to take the center line to target the bridge, she had managed to split them to the left and right once more.

Fukushima “fell” toward the one that leaped to port.

She could fall horizontally there. The third ship’s surface contained a deserted festival. The festival stands were lined up on the port, starboard, and center and the walkways were littered with abandoned attractions and food containers.

Fukushima kicked one of the wooden containers along the way.

“En garde...!”

Fukushima saw her enemy change weapons.

The god of war’s arms did not let go of the long cannons attached to its sides. Instead it used...

...The waist armor!

That armor expanded like wings to handle defense of its lower body. The armor on the front right side moved like a crustacean’s claws.

If it lowered its hips and glided toward her, the waist armor would fly toward her in a piercing attack.

It was coming.

Fukushima did not dodge the approaching charge.

As the straight claws of the armor flew toward her nearly horizontally, she kicked off the edge of a stand's roof.

"Straight ahead...!"

The god of war's right-side cannon fired, but she did not care. She spun to the right in midair and the shell grazed the bottom of her ponytail.

"Fall...Ichinotani!"

Her divine weapon, Ichinotani, opened its blade.

Ichinotani could absorb her opponent's attack and then release it.

Ichinotani currently contained an anti-ship ether cannon blast used for the initial attack.

The light was launched in an instant. Ichinotani's blade opened horizontally and its close-range attack flew toward the god of war.

It targeted the enemy's side. Because its right knee was moved somewhat forward, it was turned a bit to the side and its right side faced her.

She scored a direct hit.

But not on her opponent's side. Instead...

"The cannon!?"

Fukushima saw how the enemy had defended.

The enemy god of war had removed the cannon from the hard point on its right side.

The canon barrel had fallen.

But...

...At the exact height to match my cannon blast!

That was precisely what had happened.

Her cannon blast had collided with the falling cannon barrel.

The god of war's long cannon was a quasi-anti-ship cannon. The barrel was made to endure firepower at that level.

After being hit by her anti-ship cannon blast, the barrel instantly swelled out. The power of the blast melted the inside, but the power that escaped the muzzle launched the long cannon backwards before destroying it.

The ruptured cannon flew through the gap between the god of war's raised right arm and right wing.

Its flight only lasted a split-second. At a point 29 meters behind the god of war, the flying cannon exploded.

Fukushima saw the light.

And she saw the god of war's silhouette charge forward within that light.

She realized the enemy's charge had not slowed at all. Also, its waist armor swung upwards toward her height.

The straight claws of the waist armor were directed toward her airborne body.

It was going to hit.

Kiyomasa saw the cannon burst on the port side.

Her own battlefield was on the starboard side. She used the two Caledfwlchs in a swordfight against the god of war.

She used one Caledfwlch fall back toward stern and to assist her jumps and she used the other one to actually battle the god of war.

She did not have the physical strength to clash blades with the god of war, so she continually fell back while using the attack Caledfwlch for short-range acceleration that built up the blade's force before an attack.

Sound rang out and several festival stands were knocked away. Each time, fruit or coolant water scattered through the air.

But as she fell back and clashed...

...Fukushima-sama!?

Doubt filled her heart, but she did not have time to check. The enemy was repeatedly attacking her with its expanded waist armor while also firing its cannons.

And she heard a metallic sound from the port side.

Out of the corner of her eye, she saw a short line reflect the light as it flew aft.

Fukushima's Ichinotani had been knocked away by the enemy's attack.

The enemy had defended against Fukushima's attack.

But Kiyomasa did not hesitate to use Caledfwlch.

...This one is mine!

They had a goal: their enemy.

"The Ten Spears are an anti-Musashi unit!"

They were in the second year while Musashi's main force was in the third year, so they had a one year disadvantage. They had to catch up to their enemies, but they also had a duty to surpass them.

And the foundation of their enemy's offense was their Vice Chancellor. At IZUMO before Novgorod, she had directly fought with and defeated Hexagone Française gods of war.

Humans could defeat gods of war.

Of course, the Five Great Peaks and each nation's Vice Chancellor would also be able to do that. Even the Special Duty Officers would be able to with preparation time.

In that case, the Ten Spears also had to be able to. So...

...This one is mine!

Without turning toward Fukushima, Kiyomasa fell back with the right Caledfwlch.

She launched acceleration toward the god of war ahead of her and she leaped backwards.

Then the god of war moved in. It could give an extra push with its wing acceleration. And...

...Here comes the cannon fire!

As soon as she saw the enemy's left side, Kiyomasa twisted to the left while still falling back.

A shell passed by her face, where her head had just been.

The god of war had fired the long cannon attached to its side at close range.

The shell smashed the festival stands behind her on the right. The diagonally-fired shot plowed through around a dozen stands and launched them into the sky.

Kiyomasa accelerated backwards while the shards, fruits, and water rained down.

She kept moving.

She moved around and accelerated with Caledfwlch to avoid all of the falling objects as she passed through the remains of the festival.

"Coming through...!"

And just as she thought she was through, the enemy took a certain action.

Its shoulder moved.

The previous shot from the left side had moved the enemy's right shoulder forward while it fired something toward her.

It was not a cannon blast. Nor was it a spear.

"A shield!?"

Kiyomasa saw a gliding mass of metal.

The god of war had a shield attached to each shoulder and they moved around autonomously.

They were used to deflect all attacks to the upper body and the god of war had thrown the right one toward Kiyomasa using an autonomous thruster.

And it was not a horizontal throw. It was a side throw very close to being an underhand throw and it slid along the deck.

The attack was fully targeting her feet, so...

...Kh...!

Her bodily control and balance were not as excellent as Fukushima's.

She could not dodge to the left or right due to the festival stands on the left and the pile of collapsed ones on the right.

And even if she fled further back, the shield would continue pursuit.

"In that case...!"

She tried to jump on top of the central stands to her left.

But just as she did, that row of stands exploded from front to back.

The enemy had fired from its right side which was turned out front.

And it had not targeted her or been used to obstruct her path.

...The bridge!!

The attack was meant to secure line of fire to the bridge at the ship's stern.

The cannon blast pierced through the stands, scattered the festival structures into the air, and flew toward the bridge.

Kiyomasa did not look back. She could hear it behind her and on the left. The bridge's armor had deflected the shell.

The bridge was not destroyed, so she leaped.

Leaped forward, that is.

She jumped over the sliding shield and landed on the wreckage of the destroyed stands. She slid atop a wall panel and aimed her right Caledfwlch toward the enemy.

The enemy god of war used the recoil of its right cannon to pull its upper body to the right. It quickly swung its left side forward to meet her attack, but it was too late.

The center of its torso was wide open.

So Kiyomasa aimed there. She directed the tip of the right spear toward the silver chest in midair.

“Finish this. ...Caledfwlch!!”

She prepared to launch a straight-line blast from Caledfwlch’s blade.

It was a difference of only an instant.

Kiyomasa saw something just before she fired her cannon: a shadow.

...Eh?

Something that was not quite darkness appeared overhead.

“A tent!?”

It was a light brown cloth that had formed the roof of a festival stand. The thick canvas was a three-meter square, but instead of falling, it had been launched overhead.

The movement clearly ignored both the wind and the previous explosive blast. After all, it fell toward her at the center instead of being blown outwards.

Kiyomasa realized what this meant.

...The god of war’s right arm!

When the enemy had fired on the bridge with its right cannon, it had swung its left half forward. While doing so, it had torn the tent from the roof of a stand near its right hand.

The blast of firing had likely allowed it to easily pull the tent away.

It had then used the recoil to spin its body and pull with its right arm. By letting go of the tent, the canvas flew in to cover Kiyomasa from overhead.

It ultimately robbed her of her overhead vision.

Caledfwlch was targeting the enemy’s chest, but that was now behind the tent.

...Oh, no!

Caledfwlch’s target was now behind cover.

“...!”

She tensed without meaning to.

And then a wind arrived.

It was not a natural wind.

It was created by the great pressure of the god of war's action as it charged forward right in front of her.

That lightly shook the tent blinding her.

She could see it.

The enemy was moving beyond the tent.

The chest was now in a different position. The enemy had turned so its right side was forward.

...That's insane!!

She was so impressed by the enemy's decision that she forgot all about having her attack neutralized.

After all, the enemy had just fired on the right and used the recoil to bring its left side forward.

But it had forcibly stopped that and then returned to this position.

Even a simple assessment showed that would require stopping the full force of the cannon blast.

Just how much of a burden would that place on the god of war's body? The straining and bending caused shimmering heat to erupt from the hips and the base of the left leg.

It could not make that same action a second time.

But Kiyomasa had already lost her timing for firing Caledfwlch.

Unless she forcibly turned her body around, the enemy would not be in her line of fire. So even if she tried to fire the left Caledfwlch...

...I won't be fast enough!

And the enemy was now firing its cannon properly. The one on its right side

aimed toward her...

“...!”

And Kiyomasa heard the pilot’s spirit.

Their fighting spirit forced out a groan of anguish as a sign of their desperate attempt.

Kiyomasa did not hear the cannon. And she saw darkness deep in the barrel.

“Ah.”

The tent fell on her.

With the sound of a hole being opened in the air, the falling tent was blown through.

The wreckage of the festival stands on the deck were blasted to either side and the tent stopped in the center of that newly-formed valley. The shell was so fast that it did not blow the tent away.

The cannon had fired thrice in quick succession.

Each shot created a hole in the tent and the god of war used the recoil to spin around.

But it used that momentum to launch its left arm forward.

That powerful metal arm had drawn the long spear from its hip.

The sharp attack pierced the tent.

The tent spread out as if to cover the shape of the spear’s cross-section and then it was shredded without a sound.

The god of war did not stop there.

Light was launched from the area hidden behind the tent.

It was Caledfwlch’s acceleration light. The scattering of white light flew in a straight line toward the bow.

Since the enemy had lost her chance to fire Caledfwlch, she had instead used it for acceleration and put more distance between them.

So the god of war did not let her get away.

It rotated its right cannon to cock it and then used its spin to bring its left cannon forward.

“...!”

It fired.

It aimed past Caledfwlch’s flying light and at the large shield it had thrown earlier. The god of war fired four shots toward the sliding object that the enemy would likely use for cover next.

With a solid sound, the metal shield was knocked upwards along with Caledfwlch.

The wind whipped up, everything was swallowed up by momentum, and the mass of metal flew into a row of festival stands.

Destruction followed. But while the god of war spun in the opposite direction, its forward speed was unabated. However...

“—————”

At that moment, the metal knight definitely heard something.

It was a voice.

“Wait.”

It came from dead ahead.

But the distance was odd. The voice did not come from the area the god of war had blown away and scattered. It did not come from the large shield that had been blasted along with Caledfwlch.

The voice came from right down at the god of war’s feet.

Someone stood up from the rubble below its racing feet.

It was Katou Kiyomasa.

The god of war saw the scene.

A blonde figure stood up from the pile of rubble that seemed to have spilled

across the entire deck.

“Impossible...!”

Despite all the festival stand fragments and splinters of wooden containers, there should not have been anything large enough to hide a person.

Beforehand, the god of war’s cannon blasts had blown away pretty much all rubble along that straight-line path.

But Kiyomasa had appeared right in front of it: directly below the tent it had fired on so many times.

How had she hidden there?

She already held the answer in her hand.

“Caledfwlch!?”

Chapter 45: Confronter in the Rubble

第四十五章

『瓦礫場の正対主』



近況の認知
現状の把握
実状の理解
配点 (自覚)

Perception of the situation

Understanding of the circumstances

Comprehension of the state of affairs

Point Allocation (Self-Awareness)

Kiyomasa had made a single decision.

She would dodge the enemy's attacks. That was all.

After all, the enemy's intent to attack was powerful. Hexagone Française's god of war knights were a historic group and these were members who specialized in cutting-edge tactics. And they were considered aces on top of that.

She knew this enemy would never overlook her even in an exchange that only lasted a few moments.

And her sense of danger proved accurate when the enemy made multiple attacks to finish her off.

So she moved.

She started with a cannon blast. She had been unable to fire her right Caledfwlch, but she did so anyway.

...Straight down.

She had wanted to fire it backwards so that it tore across the deck, but she had not had time.

She was only able to fire a thick anti-shelter blast from the Caledfwlch while it was aimed down like she was stabbing it into the deck by her right foot. She had rushed the output setting, but the attack had likely reached the tertiary armor.

But by dropping herself down into that hole, the enemy had lost sight of her.

When thrusting a cannon or spear straight out, it created a blind spot in your lower vision. Kiyomasa had correctly guessed that the enemy would not expect her to be down below after most of the rubble had been blown away.

But she had needed to go further than that.

Kiyomasa had chosen to abandon one of her Caledfwlchs by launching it backwards while the tent was still blocking the enemy's view.

By firing the Caledfwlch toward the bow at the same time the enemy pulled back its spear, she could draw its gaze.

The enemy reacted exactly the way she had hoped.

And...

"Finish this."

The enemy attacked while passing by.

The enemy twisted its body for a horizontal sweep of its spear, so she dodged it with a side flip and...

"...Caledfwlch."

The blade of light severed the enemy's right hand at the shoulder.

Fukushima blocked the enemy's expanded armor claws with Ichinotani.

With a metallic clang her vision was dyed white by scattering sparks.

"Kh..."

Ichinotani was knocked away. Of course, that was the obvious result based on the difference in weight.

Fukushima used the instant of recoil and made sure her arm was not ripped off by letting go of Ichinotani and flying through the air.

She made a spinning leap through the starboard sky to the right of the enemy.

The enemy immediately reacted.

Its weapon of choice was a jab of its right hand. The tips of the metal fingers were narrow and flat in order to grab small objects.

"...!"

The jab was made with the palm facing up and its initial speed surrounded it

with a white explosion of water vapor.

Instead of instantly approaching, it reached her. And that attack was made without any hesitation.

But Fukushima fell. She used her Headfirst Fall acceleration spell to take evasive action.

There were footholds there.

Fruits had flown into the air from the row of festival stands.

They were citrus. Fukushima used those yellow summer fruits as footholds. She touched them with her toes, and...

“Headfirst Fall...!”

She fell.

She repeatedly fell forward, toward the space in the air just a bit ahead of the god of war.

She spun her body.

“...!”

And she made a decision about which route to take in this evasive chain of footholds that still kept her within reach of the enemy.

She read the location. She viewed the air in a single instant and noted the locations at close and long range. With that done, she grasped the direction of movement, the speed, and the weight of all the airborne objects.

“Testament...!!”

Then she soared.

And something fell from the sky and into her hand: Ichinotani.

The *Lourd de Marionnette* realized the enemy had reclaimed her weapon.

Ichinotani was a divine weapon that absorbed any received power and then re-fired it.

The *Lourd de Marionnette*'s expanded armor had definitely been hit by that

earlier.

It might have been a weak power when it came to anti-*Lourd de Marionnette* attacks, but that would change if it struck a joint or a weak point.

So the *Lourd de Marionnette* viewed Fukushima as an enemy.

It recognized her as an opponent it needed to defeat moving through the air.

And in order to strike her...

“———!!”

It used its full power.

At their speed, the span of time known as an “instant” could be divided into many smaller units.

The god of war and Fukushima made several high-speed exchanges.

Fukushima’s speed while repeatedly leaping through the air was an accumulation of falls. Her speed rose with each one and her hair was extended in a straight line without fluttering.

The god of war did not let up while pursuing her.

It used its full speed with its right side out front and it used its jabbing right hand and its expanding waist armor.

The god of war had dropped its right cannon, but it could not use the left one either.

That was because Fukushima was keeping her position within range of the right arm.

But she did not attack. She too knew the power contained within Ichinotani was weak. So she watched for an opening and, when she saw the appropriate timing coming...

“...Nh!”

“Kh...!”

During their exchange of body movements and positioning, the god of war

chose to make a cut.

It briefly slowed to place Fukushima in the air in front of it.

The distance between them grew.

At approximately seven meters, it was beyond the reach of a human.

Even for a 12m heavy god of war, that was only barely within its maximum reach.

So the god of war slammed its four wings backwards. It forcibly accelerated itself straight ahead along the deck.

It quickly moved forward while targeting Fukushima at her position nine meters above the deck.

It advanced.

The push from its back just about toppled it forward.

But the god of war used that motion to launch its final attack on Fukushima. As if to say goodbye, it threw a flat-handed jab while passing by.

The strike used not just its shoulder but its entire upper body.

The way its body arched and bent was reproducing a human action.

The arm extended and the wire cylinders of the joints raced out.

“Ohh...!”

Its rapidly-moving metal fingers reached the airborne figure.

Fukushima repeated the process.

She continually fell through the air while keeping her eyes on the metal hand jabbing toward her.

Simply dodging was not enough.

...The god of war's speed has already surpassed my own!

If she only dodged, she would be caught by the shockwave produced by the arm.

And if she jumped inward, she would definitely be hit by the god of war's advancing body.

But if she jumped outward, she would never catch back up.

...In that case...

Fukushima repeated the process some more.

The method was simple. She fell into the air in front of the god of war to stay ahead of it, and...

"...Toh!"

She grabbed an airborne splinter of a festival stand and threw it toward her feet.

She created a falling foothold for herself. She stood upon it, and...

"There!"

She kicked the final foothold: the god of war's jabbing hand.

Her repeatedly-falling feet definitely touched the tip as it flew quickly toward her. And a moment later...

"...!"

She strongly kicked off the jabbing hand's fingertips and she fell.

...I did it!

Fukushima confirmed she was out ahead of the god of war.

She had left the rows of festival stands and reached the air above the aft plaza.

And in that space 30m away from the bridge, she was certain of her coming victory.

There was space between them.

But it was her turn.

The enemy was accelerating, but its entire body was leaning forward. And it

had only just swung its right arm inward. Its shoulder was protecting its neck, but its face sensors were visible.

The face had to be her target. That was the standard when attacking a god of war.

But then she saw a sudden color: silver.

It was flat and large and it raced toward her along the line of fire she was considering.

...Huh?

Her confused heart stopped her movements. But that saved her life.

It was a shield.

The autonomous shield connected to the god of war's shoulder had been swung up and launched.

The device used its own power to launch itself out along the jabbing arm.

Fukushima saw it, so she took action.

"...Kh!"

She fired Ichinotani's cannon blast on the flying shield.

An impact split the air and Fukushima flew backwards.

The shield had not directly hit her.

Ichinotani's attack had caused the mass of metal's speed to waver and she had kicked powerfully off of it.

"...Headfirst Fall!"

Fukushima fell in the direction that allowed the impact to leave her.

She fell.

She bent back and spun in midair.

Her falling acceleration grew too great and her speed outstripped her.

But she transformed that spin into a proper flip in the direction of her fall.

After rotating by 360 degrees and bringing her body under control, she fell forward through the air while half turned on her side.

But her trajectory was shifted somewhat.

She was headed a bit toward the center of the ship, putting her dead ahead of the god of war.

The god of war's shield had done that.

The jabbing arm had been somewhat hooked. The shield had flown along that inward curve, so Fukushima had been sent toward the center of the ship when she kicked off of it.

And the god of war had its cannon at the ready.

It was not afraid of having Fukushima's Ichinotani absorb that power. After all, it could fire more than once and it had its shield even if one was returned. Also...

"You have no footholds left!!"

With that shout, the god of war fired on Fukushima.

It fired thrice.

The *Lourd de Marionnette* pilot watched it all play out.

First, his sight devices saw Fukushima look back in midair.

Beyond her dancing ponytail and raised Ichinotani, her sharp eyes stared back at him.

It was not hostility that filled her gaze.

It was fighting spirit.

And in front of that gaze, a shell exploded between the two of them.

Ichinotani had blocked the first shell.

It was unable to fully contain the impact, so Fukushima was sent flying.

The *Lourd de Marionnette's* calculation ability predicted the path of her flight.

The second of the latter two shots was on course to hit her.

After all, there were no footholds in the direction of her flight. Nor were there any fragments flying through the air there. He had used the jab and shield combo to ensure that.

Thus, there was nothing she could do.

Also, he was still wary of her Headfirst Fall acceleration spell.

That spell did seem to have its limits, but it allowed her to repeatedly fall in the direction she wanted to go. What would happen if she did that in the direction of her current flight?

The first of the latter two shots was aimed in that direction.

So there was nowhere for her to escape.

The *Lourd de Marionnette* pilot accelerated. He shot forward to determine Fukushima's fate.

"Ohhh...!"

He grabbed his left spear while moving forward.

He would pierce her with the spear. After all...

"You absorbed that first shot, didn't you...!?"

There was a chance she would counteract the next shell with that.

So the *Lourd de Marionnette* pilot accelerated to stop that.

He did not hold back. He caught up to his own shell and thrust the spear forward with identical timing. He pulled back his right side and swung his left-side wings for the additional acceleration needed to perform the long spear attack at the same time as the shell.

"Go!"

All of the attacks would reach his opponent.

I did it, observed the *Lourd de Marionnette* pilot through his sight devices.

But then he noticed something.

There were footholds in Fukushima's path.

They were fruits and festival stand fragments.

He had not created them. That kind of battlefield destruction had supposedly already ended on the starboard side and the battle on the port side had supposedly fallen a bit behind them.

...*Then...*

His vision saw a single burst of sparks.

A high-speed shell had collided with the front armor of the third ship's circular bridge.

The *Lourd de Marionnette* on the port side had launched it.

He knew why.

His companion on the port side had fired on the center row of festival stands to clear the line of fire for targeting the bridge.

And that had scattered stand fragments into the air above the aft plaza.

...*It can't be...!*

The *Lourd de Marionnette* pilot breathed a nonexistent gasp at what his enemy, Fukushima Masanori, had done.

Had she predicted this situation?

He could think of a way: During their earlier exchange of speed, she had definitely grasped all of her surroundings.

And at her altitude then, she would have been able to see what was happening on the port side. So...

"You predicted it...!?"

Fukushima's actions seemed to act as confirmation.

She kicked off a flying foothold and dodged his shell and spear to the left.

She evaded.

He had just made a left thrust with all his might.

From the outer left, he was protected by his left arm and shield, but...

...The shield...!

Just as he realized he needed to protect his face...

“Fall! ...Ichinotani!”

The *Lourd de Marionnette* pilot received a damaging impact to the left of his face.

Kiyomasa saw the result of the starboard battle.

...Fukushima-sama!

She felt a strange mixture of joy and relief, but her own battle was not yet over.

She had severed the right arm of her god of war opponent.

Fukushima had damaged the left face of her god of war opponent.

But both opponents would have immediately cut off the transmission of pain and data from the damaged parts. Even if the one's right arm had been cut off, the body's data control management would make virtual weight calculations to allow for mobility on the same level as with both arms.

The god of war had not lost its power.

So Kiyomasa raised Caledfwlch and pursued her enemy.

The gods of war still did not understand their own level of injury, so...

...We must sink them!

And Kiyomasa raised her voice to do just that.

“Fukushima-sama!”

They would work together to defeat these two gods of war. And...

...That is the starting point Fukushima-sama needs to rid herself of her frustration!

To fulfill that movement of her heart, Kiyomasa aimed Caledfwlch toward the

god of war's back.

"Finish this...!"

"Whoops."

She heard a sudden voice.

And it came from right in front of her. Someone stood directly ahead of Caledfwlch just as she prepared to fire it.

It was an old man.

Fukushima saw a figure standing before her.

It was an old man.

It happened just as she landed and prepared to pursue the god of war.

The man casually wore a Far Eastern summer uniform.

He was short, his hair was thin, and he had a somehow kind-looking smile. However...

...Huh?

Fukushima felt like her eyes could not focus on the old man in front of her.

"————"

She quickly shook her head. She did not know if it was due to sweat or tension, but her eyes finally managed to focus. And...

"You're a sharp one."

She heard a voice. It contained more strength than she would have expected for such an old man.

He was short, his hair was knotted in the back, and he wore a round hat on his head.

This was a different old man from before. However...

"Do you have a moment?"

The voice was different, but the manner of speech was the same.

Fukushima noticed something when she saw him.

She was squeezing Ichinotani with all her might.

...This...!

Fukushima realized what this was in front of her.

...This is a monster taking the form of a man...!

Fukushima was reminded of when she had been in front of Katsuie.

No, Katsuie himself would forcibly hide his presence inside himself.

But this old man did not hide it.

It was not his appearance that stood out. It was the overwhelming presence merely contained inside a human shape.

Could she call it “enormous”?

Her worries told her she needed to be prepared to be trampled if he so much as moved and prepared to be stimulated if he so much as breathed.

That was what stood before her.

He was merely speaking with her for fun at the moment.

“Who are-...?”

She tried to ask who he was. But...

“Ho ho?” The old man laughed quietly in his throat. “You can tell that much when I am simply standing before you? Excellent. Most excellent. ...You have a better head on you than Kakei or Sasuke.”

And Fukushima realized two things: the old man all of a sudden held an opened fan in his hand, and...

...The gods of war aren't moving!?

The gods of war and the two girls had been engaging in an exchange of high speed and acceleration.

Then this old man had butted in and spoken with her, so the gods of war

should have been able to attack the bridge already.

It would not have surprised her to find the bridge was already destroyed and the gods of war were on their way to the fourth ship.

And yet the gods of war remained stopped.

In fact...

...Everything around me.

Fukushima checked her surroundings while keeping her eyes on the old man.

It had stopped.

All of it had: the festival stand fragments, the flying fruits, the dust, and even the water vapor smoke produced by acceleration were frozen in place, as if to paint a three-dimensional picture.

Then she heard a sudden voice.

“Here.”

The old man closed his fan.

Something immediately disappeared: the gods of war.

Both of those giant forms vanished from the left and right. The silver enemies were erased like theatre curtains closing from either side.

“Now, then.”

The fan fully closed at the same time as he waved his wrist.

Immediately, a voice reached Fukushima’s ears.

“Fukushima-sama!”

She was on the starboard side facing aft, but Kiyomasa’s voice reached her from port.

“This man...”

She provided the monster’s identity.

“...is Sanada 1st Special Duty Officer Katou Danzou!!”

Kiyomasa knew the person in front of her.

He was Katou Danzou.

According to the Testament, he was one of the strongest ninjas of the Warring States period. He had served the Uesugi clan, but when his skill was tested just for fun, the Uesugi clan had grown to fear him and tried to hunt him down.

...He supposedly did a massive amount of damage to them and then joined Takeda.

That was how he had ended up at Sanada.

This was her first time meeting him, but she knew of him. After all...

“For the history recreation of Katou Danzou supporting Sviet Rus, you entered Novgorod and served Mayoress Marfa, didn’t you?”

“You know about that? Was that part of your preliminary research before attacking Novgorod? If so...”

The old man raised the corners of his lips. Above his average-height shoulders, his bald-headed face smiled.

“Did you know that Katou Danzou is also known as Flying^[2] Katou the Illusion User?”

She did know.

“You are known as one of the strongest ninjas of the Warring States period. ... But the illusions are in name only and you actually use ‘games’ that bring very real harm.”

“Games are fun, aren’t they?”

The old man had raised his hand at some point.

Something sat on that right hand’s palm.

...Me?

It was a doll. A super-deformed papier-mache doll.

The doll suddenly moved in Danzou’s hand. It held its head between its hands

and then faced her with a smile. And...

“Kiyo-dono!!”

Just as Fukushima called out to her, the doll removed its own head from its body.

Immediately, Kiyomasa realized her own neck had been sliced.

“Kiyo-dono!”

Fukushima cried out as blood sprayed into the air beyond the row of collapsed festival stands.

She had no idea what was happening, but Kiyomasa had been attacked. And...

...At a vital point!?

But she heard a breath and a voice.

“I should have expected this from the Ten Spears. ...It seems that was not enough to behead you.”

Fukushima did not look back.

...This opponent...

She was not certain, but Fukushima had a feeling she must not look at this enemy.

So she intentionally kept her gaze on Kiyomasa. And...

“I am fine.”

She heard Kiyomasa’s calm tone of voice.

But the position was different. Instead of right in front of the old man like before, she was now a few meters back from there.

She had used Caledfwlch’s acceleration to fall back the instant the slash hit her.

And she held Caledfwlch with its blade raised in front of her.

“If you thought you could kill someone by playing with dolls, you are quite the

naïve illusion user.”

Kiyomasa’s throat had not stopped bleeding, but a pale white band of ether light was tied around her neck and pressed against the wound.

“Why are you here? I have heard nothing of Sanada supporting Mouri.”

“For a personal grudge. ...Belonging to someone other than myself.”

Fukushima listened to Danzou’s response.

“I am the one that the self-styled ‘Unneeded’ of Sanada refer to as their great teacher.”

Kiyomasa frowned while letting her spilled body heat flow from her neck and between her breasts.

The old man in front of her smiled with his fan covering his mouth.

“That should be more than enough of a reason for this duel.”

“Is this for revenge?”

“No, no.” Danzou smiled behind his fan. He pressed the fan against his forehead and lightly tapped his own head. “You all are attacking something that need not be lost and you have driven it to a place of resolve. I thought I would ask you why.”

His fan tapped his head again.

Immediately, everything disappeared.

Danzou, the gods of war, and all the rubble and fragments frozen around her.

“Eh...?”

The remains of the battle were there. The festival was destroyed. She held one Caledfwlch and the other lay alongside a god of war shield further aft.

And as for her neck...

“ ...”

Her hand was stained with blood.

She had been hit.

“Kiyo-dono!”

Hearing Fukushima’s voice, Kiyomasa breathed in.

She tried to gather strength in her belly, her legs, and especially her knees.
But...

“Ah.”

It was too late. The blood loss sapped her strength and she fell onto her butt.

Kiyomasa felt herself go limp.

The blood loss was part of the cause, but being released from all that tension played a bigger role. And...

“...!”

She looked up at Fukushima who had run over and stood in front of her.

She smiled up at the girl, but that may have had the opposite effect. Those who had come out to intercept the gods of war called over from the fourth ship behind this one.

They could say they had endured that attack.

And as a result, Fukushima had achieved victory.

But Kiyomasa could see Fukushima.

Her sitting position gave her the perfect view of Fukushima’s downcast look.

Her eyebrows were bent and she tried but failed to keep her mouth tightly shut. The hand holding Ichinotani was trembling.

“Kh...”

“Fukushima-sama.”

Kiyomasa chose to say what Fukushima had started to say but stopped.

“You feel frustrated, don’t you?”

Just as they thought they had defeated the gods of war, a new enemy had

intervened and stopped them.

And he had used an overwhelming and absurd power. The gods of war had been erased and then he had disappeared without a trace. Also...

...He simultaneously appeared in front of both me and Fukushima-sama.

Was that normal for an illusion user?

But looking at it that way, the result was entirely different.

They had not endured the attack.

They had been spared.

And that may have been why Fukushima hung her head.

She angled her head so far that her bangs hid her face.

“Dammit...”

She yelled while squeezing Ichinotani’s shaft so hard she might have been trying to crush it.

This was anger.

She had been so impatient to make progress, but she had been stopped in her tracks. This cry was proof that she had accepted that situation.

She opened her mouth wide and tears spilled from behind her bangs.

“Ahhhhhhhhhhh...!!!”

Kiyomasa listened to Fukushima’s roar.

This cry finally let out everything that had been pent up since Novgorod.

The smashed and broken festival deck looked like a city after a powerful storm and Kiyomasa sat there as she answered Fukushima’s cry with a nod.

...Finally.

It had started during that duel at Mito and it ended now.

Fukushima had been unsure how they could correct themselves after their loss and she had generally thought it would all work out if they simply pursued

their enemies, but...

...She has finally accepted it.

Accepted that they were inexperienced.

So Kiyomasa said, "It's okay."

With those words, she realized she was at her limit.

I have used up too much of myself, she thought with a mental sigh while forming her next words.

She spoke to Fukushima whose tears dripped from beyond her bangs and whose breaths transformed into a groaning roar.

...It's okay.

"Now it is our turn to make a comeback."

She had to wonder if she was smiling as she said that.

She closed her eyes.

And while noticing just how warm the sunlight was, she collapsed onto her back.

Chapter 46: Boy and Girl in a Room of Goodbyes

第四十六章

『送り出し部屋の男女』



言ってよかった
言わなきゃよかった
差し引き出来ればいいのにね
配点 (攻め込まれ)

I'm glad I said that

I wish I hadn't said that

I wish I could strike the right balance **Point Allocation (Under Attack)**

"So are you all ready? ...Oh, look. You already forgot your bamboo bottle."

A girl's voice reverberated through a small room.

With the sound of a wheelchair moving, Miriam handed over a bamboo bottle. The translucent girl sitting on her lap then spoke.

"Papa, where are you going?"

"Well, you see? Papa is going to the surface with some other girls."

"Are you leaving mama...!?"

She asked it so seriously that Azuma had to think for a moment.

"What should I say, Miriam?"

"I wasn't expecting such a serious reaction either. ...But papa really is going on a vacation with several other girls."

"S-stop that, Miriam! It's just a study camp."

"I'm glad you didn't refuse to go out of some weird consideration for me." Miriam glanced here and there around the room. "Are you forgetting anything?"

"I might be..."

"You have to bring your own blanket, right?"

"Huh? Do I...?"

"You aren't used to spending the night outside, are you? Oh, if you need a string to tie it up, use the band on my bed. It's only meant to keep my blanket from falling off, but it should be enough."

Miriam smiled bitterly as he quickly climbed the ladder and gathered up his blanket.

“You can attach it to the latch on the bottom of your backpack, can’t you?”

“Oh, is that how it’s used...?”

“You bought a pretty expensive KENDO brand for Shugendo practitioners, so I assumed you knew all about this.”

“I only bought it because the person at the shop recommended it.”

“I see.” Miriam nodded in understand. “You’re such a good customer.”

“Yeah, that’s what they said.”

“...Do you know what that means? No, I suppose not.”

Miriam glared at him, so Azuma thought about it before finally tilting his head and asking a question of his own.

“I’m really not sure what you mean, but are you going to lecture me?”

“You don’t have time for that, do you?”

“No. Um...sorry.”

She just about nodded at that, but she stopped.

“You know,” she began. “You just made one hell of a misunderstanding there. It’s not like I want to lecture you. ...Besides, a woman would prefer a man who doesn’t need to be lectured.”

“Then I’ll work hard to become one.”

“...Do you know what that means? No, I suppose not.”

Miriam glared at him, so Azuma thought about it before finally tilting his head and asking a question of his own.

“I’m really not sure what you mean, but are you going to lecture me?”

“Again, you don’t have time for that, do you?”

Getting caught in a loop was not going to help.

Miriam inspected him now that he wore the backpack with the blanket attached. She grabbed the list of what to bring and compared it to Azuma.

“Okay, I have a feeling you’re going to greatly regret putting the towel in with

everything else, but you should be fine.”

“I don’t like the sound of that first part.”

“Don’t worry about it. ...I can’t go with you, but I’ll be looking after our home, so have fun. Make sure you have some good stories for me when you get back.”

“...The others are seriously planning to fight some Celestial Dragons.”

“That fight last night was incredible too.” Miriam’s expression relaxed. “Hey, Azuma, you’ve been thinking about something after seeing that battle, haven’t you?”

“—————”

He fell silent, so...

“Bull’s eye.”

Miriam could more or less guess what Azuma was thinking.

Lately, he had taken walks with her and looked after the translucent girl. But while he did so, she had sensed that he wanted to say something but was not sure if he should.

She was not the type to urge him to do so.

She was used to waiting.

But she felt like now was the time for that urging, so she spoke to him as he wore the backpack and completed his preparations.

“Is there something you want to say?”

“Eh?”

“Yes. You’ve been thinking about something lately, haven’t you?”

“Well...yes.”

Azuma admitted to it.

So from here, Miriam only had to ask what he was going to do. But she could not think of a safe way to say the rest.

Asking him what he was thinking about might be simple, but given how long he had been worrying over it, that seemed too casual and a lot like she intended to reject it.

But she also felt like that casualness was exactly what he needed at the moment.

However...

...That won't work.

She was the one that had urged him to speak, so if she was to continue the conversation from there...

"You know-"

"Miria-"

They started speaking at almost the same moment.

Azuma looked up and she shut her mouth.

And the first to react was Miriam.

She held out a hand.

"What is it? You go first."

"No, um, what did you want to say, Miriam?"

He really is good at throwing off my plans, she thought. What a pain, she added with a mental sigh of resolve.

"I was only trying to ask you what it was you wanted to say."

Now she too had exposed her great interest in him.

"Will you tell me?"

He immediately nodded at her question.

And he meaninglessly looked to the left and right.

"It wasn't just last night. For a while now, I've been wondering if there really is nothing I can do."

I knew it, thought Miriam.

This was why he had been going on walks with her and looking after the girl.

...It was all a way of searching for something he could do.

He had also started some part-time work, so his way of thinking had changed a good deal.

He had been someone who was looked after and worried for by others, but now he was someone who looked after and worried for others.

And if the Musashi as a whole was desperately working at its approach toward the entire world...

"My friends...no, everyone here is working so hard, and so are the other nations. Even in our enemy of P.A. Oda, everyone must be working so hard."

"It is important to understand the other side, but you can't let yourself empathize with them too much."

"I know that."

But...

"I think we could manage an...approach that crosses over between this side and the other side."

"What made you think that?"

"A lot of the things I've seen...but I think it was mostly when we went to Novgorod."

The translucent girl then spoke up while half sunken into Miriam's arms.

"The library..."

"That's right." Azuma smiled. And he said, "When everyone was speaking with Lady Yasuhira, Vice President Honda-kun was thoughtful, Asama-san was hesitant, Aoi-kun helped out, but if the various bonds of the current world can be found in discussions of history like that..."

"Yes?"

"I could take responsibility and-..."

“No. Wrong.”

Sorry, thought Miriam with a sigh.

...But he's such an idiot.

The way of thinking from his imperial lifestyle would crop up in the weirdest places.

“Do not take responsibility when it will only make things worse. Everyone will work together to reach a positive resolution. ...That's what our classmates are sure to say.”

“But...”

“You barely ever make an actual appearance, so if you took responsibility, you really would be acting as a puppet. It would only harm Musashi's reputation. Besides, you've begun a secular life. So...”

Miriam raised her right index finger.

Why am I so irritated? she wondered.

“No one will take you seriously if you start talking about taking responsibility. So...”

“What?”

“What if you gave them advice instead?”

She had only meant it as a possibility. But...

“Miriam.”

Azuma raised his eyebrows a bit as he spoke.

His strong tone made Miriam think he was going to ask her not to make fun of him.

And then Azuma continued.

“The thing is...I don't know enough about history to give advice.”

Azuma nodded with confidence at what he had said.

After all, the imperial history was the “official” history. He had learned that all too well when listening to Sanyou in the library before going to Novgorod.

Besides, they had Neshinbara and Asama for that kind of thing. His knowledge and support were far smaller than theirs. There would probably be times when his little knowledge fit perfectly in the gaps of their knowledge, but that was not the same as giving advice.

...I’m ignorant, aren’t I?

“I am well aware of that.”

So...

“That’s why I want to take responsibility.”

“You’re more than I had bargained for.”

Yay, she complimented me...or not. That glare says not. I’ve figured out that much. I fell victim to this so many times before I did.

But Miriam held the translucent girl tight as she spoke.

“Is there anything you can do?”

“Right now, probably only making a living by working part-time.”

Azuma felt like so many things had been brought back to square one. If this was how it would be, he wished he had spoken to her sooner and gotten her help in restarting and changing direction. However...

...Ah.

If he was thinking that way, it would mean he did want to do something.

He had likely already made that decision in his heart. After all...

...Everyone is working so hard.

“The thing is.”

This might be sudden, he thought as he spoke.

“Everyone has such a hard time just making a living.”

“So you noticed. Just supporting yourself requires a lot of hard work.”

“Right,” agreed Azuma.

He had realized something recently.

...People aren't just working for their own lives.

The scope differed from person to person, but everyone supported a portion of the nation known as Musashi.

Even his part-time job at a market cash register was like that. He had not become a portion of the corporate group managing the market. He was in charge of a small portion of a market owned by a corporate group that was a part of Musashi.

If he left that position, it would create a gap in Musashi.

Someone else could probably fill that gap, but it would still require rearranging the pieces that composed Musashi.

It was the same with his pay. The corporate group could not print their own money, so the corporation was simply taking some of the money circulating throughout Musashi and giving it to someone who was in charge of a portion of Musashi.

By working, he was in charge of a portion of Musashi in some way.

“It hit me when I was paid for helping with the Musashi's repairs recently.”

“Yes, that does make it feel like you're ‘making’ Musashi.”

“Yeah...it's especially obvious with those of us directly working on it, but it's also true for Naito-kun and Naruze-kun who carry the parts, for Ohiroshiki-kun who supplies food, and for everyone else too.”

“Then wouldn't *that* be enough for you?”

“Hmm,” groaned Azuma as he thought about Miriam's question.

After a few beats, he answered her.

“You see, it's about something Aoi-kun and Horizon said. If anyone is feeling they need someone to take responsibility for their lifestyle because they can't do anything and always need help, then they should go join those two.”

“I see.” Miriam held the girl. “It sounds like papa is leaving to be with a boy...”

“Papa likes boys?”

“L-let’s stop that.” Azuma sighed and opened his mouth. “I can’t say all that is true for me and...needing someone to take responsibility for my lifestyle? I don’t think I’ve been living like that.”

“If you did go there, I think there would be some very annoying parts unless you had established some relationships there already.”

That’s true, thought Azuma. At the moment, Asama and Mitotsudaira seemed headed in that direction, but they had strong relationships as a knight and an old friend.

But aside from that...

“My position is different from other people’s, so I thought I might be able to use that somehow.”

“If you take too long, you’ll reach the expiration date on that...”

When she said that with a nod, there was nothing he could say in response. However...

“Did you ask any of them for advice? Like that king?”

“No, not yet.”

“Then use this study camp to do that. They’re experts at that kind of thing, so they should give you an answer if you are indeed useful.”

With that, Miriam moved her wheelchair forward and started herding him out of the room.

What? he thought, but she glared at him.

“You have to get going, don’t you?”

“Oh, that’s right. Thank you.”

“You’re welcome. It’s only to the door, but I’ll see you off. ...Also.” She continued with a sigh. “No matter what you do or what happens, as long as you come back to us, everything can return to normal. That alone I can promise you.”

After all...

“Our promise to not interfere with each other’s lives is already falling apart and I can’t let it get any worse.”

Chapter 47: Debaters at the Water's Edge

第四十七章

『水縁の議論者達』



上は下にと忙しく
西に東に傾いて
配点（自然）

Hurrying up and down

Tilting west and east

Point Allocation (Nature)

The sounds of water fell a great distance and spread out over a wide area.

It came from the water dropping off a valley waterfall and passing over a stony riverbed.

The current was weaker in the waterfall basin, but that led to another waterfall. As the riverbed rose, the river widened and the current quickened.

The rocks kept the current from being even, so the water murmured as it churned.

Those small sounds of spray were joined by voices.

“Here I go.”

Swimsuit-wearing Futayo swung Tonbo Spare around in front of the waterfall basin.

She tried a few times to position the angle so the basin was reflected in the blade, and...

“Bind...Tonbo Spare!”

“Understood.”

The basin was split.

Some fish had been hiding near the bottom after descending in preparation to climb the waterfall, so they desperately leaped into the air to avoid the attack. Adele and Mitotsudaira caught them while another two girls stored them.

“Heh heh. I have a live-box over here. And there was a hot spring over there, so Naomasa is setting up a girl’s bath.”

Those two were Kimi and Horizon who sat on a large riverside stone with their legs soaking in the water.

Nearby, Naomasa was checking out the sturdiness of a fence set up around a

hot spring bath built from stones. Next to her, Asama had a sign frame open with a long bamboo spear sticking into the riverside rocks.

Mitotsudaira walked over from the waterfall basin while carrying fish in the summer uniform shirt she had removed.

“It looks like we’ll have enough for one per person.”

Mary was also carrying fish next to Mitotsudaira and she had some kind of spirit light around her.

Mary nodded toward that light a few times.

“It looks like we can still catch some more river fish. The water is teeming with life this year, so it looks like they will have a lot of fish making the journey upstream.”

Then she saw a few people who had their feet soaking in the live-box: Masazumi, Narumi, and Gin.

They were inspecting several sign frames.

“Date Vice Chancellor, Tachibana Wife... Which of these two reports do you think is true? One is from Hexagone Française and the other from M.H.R.R. I’m having a hard time deciding, so I could use your help.”

“Good question,” said Narumi as she looked at her own sign frame.

Date was a combat-oriented academy, so their former Vice Chancellor would be used to reading this kind of intelligence.

Narumi was comparing two texts that had been sent to her with Asama’s authorization. They were the original text taken from newspaper extra editions, so they were written in French and German.

They both provided an HQ report on the result of the battle fought that morning. However...

...There’s quite a difference between the two nations’ reports.

Then Gin spoke up next to her.

“Hexagone Française’s announcement says two god of war aces sunk two of

Hashiba's advance ships and defeated two of the Ten Spears, doesn't it?"

She can read foreign languages too, realized Narumi. And...

...Not that it's a competition.

Narumi spoke before Gin could say anything more.

"And the M.H.R.R. one says they defeated two of Hexagone Française's god of war aces and protected their advance ships."

Gin realized something from the Date Vice Chancellor's comment.

...So she can read German too.

I would expect nothing less from Date's Vice Chancellor, she thought while honestly impressed.

She had no intention of turning it into a competition.

That girl was a former Vice Chancellor and Gin was a former 3rd Special Duty Officer. Their positions were on entirely different levels.

She could not hope to compete. Thus...

Tachibana Wife: "Master Muneshige, which do you think is better: a Vice Chancellor or a 3rd Special Duty Officer?"

Tachibana Husband: "Eh? Are you talking about yourself?"

Tachibana Wife: "It is a hypothetical question."

Tachibana Husband: "Oh, I see. But I really don't think you need to worry about this, Gin. I mean, you're a former 3rd Special Duty Officer. That means you're a normal student."

Tachibana Wife: "Former?"

Tachibana Husband: "Only because I screwed up, though."

Tachibana Wife: "...Then former is fine. Just fine."

That's right, thought Gin. With the "former", the position of 3rd Special Duty Officer no longer mattered. And the other girl was a former Vice Chancellor.

They were both normal students, so there was no need to worry about all that.

Tachibana Wife: “Master Muneshige, you always show me a new way to look at things.”

Tachibana Husband: “What do you mean by that?”

Tachibana Wife: “Judge. ...You make sure I do not sully the Tachibana name. That is what I mean.”

Gin looked to the Date Vice Chancellor.

A smile naturally formed on her lips.

The other girl also seemed to be exchanging words over a limited divine chat. She seemed to be connected to the 2nd Special Duty Officer.

Unturning: “Hey, Kiyonari. Hypothetically, what would you do if I fought someone who had two prosthetic arms?”

Uqui: “You have prosthetic legs too, so you’re cooler.”

Unturning: “What if it wasn’t about the simple organic-to-inorganic ratio? What if it was about what’s on the inside?”

Uqui: “On the inside? Oh. you mean your organs! I do like things to be soft and juicy on the inside, but if you’re going to put anything in there, make sure it’s pointy and metal.”

Unturning: “Your values certainly are something else.”

Gin saw the other girl finish her conversation.

She did not know what that conversation had been about, but since the Date Vice Chancellor sighed quietly as the sign frame vanished, she must have received a satisfactory response.

Then that other girl looked to Gin and smiled.

The smile did not reach her eyes.

Oddly, the two of them spoke at the exact same moment.

“Well.”

They breathed in.

“Let’s try to get along.”

Gin said, “M.H.R.R.’s primary national trait is their reliability. So the odds are slim that anything in their report is an outright falsehood.”

Narumi replied, “But the M.H.R.R. Catholics are known for their ostentation with things like indulgences and for worshiping temporary objects in their idol worship. Plus, Hashiba used to be Mlasi. We can assume they would not hesitate to release information that gives them an advantage.”

And...

“Hexagone Française is the future ruler of Europe. They are currently fighting to determine what direction their nation will take. And yet they are preserving their forces. That means Hexagone Française has the advantage. That makes me doubt their report would contain any falsehoods.”

“I’m not so sure. The Logismoï Oplo left with Hexagone Française were of vainglory and pride. And the battlefield was within Hexagone Française. They would never let word get out if things had gone poorly for them.”

“Ho ho.”

Narumi placed a hand on her side and raised the corners of her lips.

Gin also placed a hand on her side and lifted the sides of her mouth.

“Ho ho...?”

They each reached for the other’s sign frame.

The first to ask a question was Narumi.

“What do you think this means, Tachibana Gin?”

“In the interest of fairness, how about we both answer at the same time?”

“Good idea,” agreed Narumi.

Then they both answered at once: “Both are false.”

With that conclusion, they relaxed their legs inside the live-box.

That’s what I thought, agreed Masazumi.

She first leaned toward Gin and asked a question.

“What do you think M.H.R.R. and Hashiba accomplished?”

“They probably drove back the enemy gods of war. If they had destroyed them, they would have taken the pilots prisoner and Hexagone Française would be using international public opinion to pressure them. They would say a nation that does not return POWs is barbaric.”

“Then,” said Masazumi while turning toward Narumi. “What do you think Hexagone Française accomplished?”

“They did significant damage to two of Hashiba’s ironclad ships. They also managed to escape from two of the Ten Spears. And possibly injured them. ... After all, Hashiba’s ironclad ships are hurrying toward Paris. If any of them take significant damage, they would have to be scuttled and abandoned while the others hurried on. So Hexagone Française can pass that off as ‘sinking’ them. ... And defeating some of the Ten Spears would mean robbing M.H.R.R. of a few commanders, so M.H.R.R. would have stopped their invasion. Since they haven’t, we can assume that the Ten Spears were not truly ‘defeated’,” said Narumi. “Most likely, the supposedly-defeated Ten Spears will make an appearance and show off that they’re just fine either tonight or tomorrow.”

“Then what kind of fight do you think it was?”

“Good question,” said Gin. “M.H.R.R. was apparently holding a festival on their deck for the history recreation, but they would have been strictly monitoring their surroundings thanks to the attacks over the past few days. And if the Ten Spears ended up fighting gods of war...”

Masazumi listened to Gin.

“The two gods of war must have charged the deck from close in and then escaped.”

“...Just to be sure, could it not have been an attack from the ground below the ships?”

“Aerial ships are indeed weak to attacks from below, but breaking through the bottom of the hull would require aiming a cannon perpendicular to the bottom. I doubt they could perform a high-speed charge, fire straight up, and also take on the Ten Spears who would arrive along the horizontal plane. Also, firing through the bottom of the hull is not enough to sink an aerial ship. If they were going for a hit-and-away attack, they would aim for the bridge. ...On the Oda ironclad ships, the upper deck is a flat and straight line. And with the festival set up, they would have had the perfect runway with cover on either side.”

...Wow, I'm completely ignorant about this kind of thing...

Masazumi realized she could only nod in understanding.

She felt she had gained a lot of knowledge and understanding from reading all sorts of books, but...

...I can't keep up when they're using the latest information and then making speculations based on that...

The girls in front of her were at the Vice Chancellor and 3rd Special Duty Officer levels. It was only natural for their thoughts and knowledge to be superior, but...

Vice President: “What are our Vice Chancellor and 3rd Special Duty Officer doing?”

Tonbokiri: “I just caught a big one!”

Gold Mar: “Hey, Ga-chan, adding in censor bars is so much better while listening to the valley river, isn't it?”

The word “freestyle” came to Masazumi's mind.

But Narumi suddenly said something.

“This means Hexagone Française can reuse gods of war for anti-ship attacks, doesn't it?”

“Reuse?”

“It means they do not have to build exclusively aerial gods of war like Tres España does. Most likely, Hexagone Française has built stealth god of war transport platforms.”

And...

“Those would be devastating if used against a ship like the Musashi that has a city on the surface.”

“Did you conclude that from these articles?”

“Judge,” replied Gin. “Two gods of war made a charge down the decks. If they had flown in from long range, they would have been intercepted. Most likely...”

Gin recalled the past. It had only been about two months ago.

“Hexagone Française has the same class of stealth technology used by Tres España’s San Martín during the Armada Battle. But while Tres España used it for a warship, Hexagone Française has used it for a god of war launch platform.”

“Platform?”

The Date Vice Chancellor nodded at that question.

“In this case, you can think of it like an aircraft carrier. Isn’t that right?”

She turned around to look at Gin who observed her face.

She was not smiling. This was the look of someone who had years of experience in strategy meetings.

Excellent, thought Gin as she nodded.

“To destroy the bridges of M.H.R.R.’s ironclad ships, they have to use anti-ship cannons or a penetration spear. This was the debut of that strategy and, since this is Hexagone Française, the nation of gods of war and knights, they likely used spears. That means they would have used ground gods of war equipped with quasi-anti-ship cannons and spears along with aerial combat equipment.”

“...Spears and...quasi-...anti-ship cannons?”

“Quasi-anti-ship cannons are used to destroy the structures built on top of a ship. That equipment provides them the optimal weight for performing an

aerial charge. Carrying them along with the spears is necessary for the success of the mission with two gods of war.”

A clear question mark appeared on the Vice President’s face when she heard that.

How should I explain this? wondered Gin, but Date’s Vice Chancellor did so for her.

“If they’re willing to make it a suicide mission, they could use a single god of war armed with a spear. And that stance can work to increase the fighting spirit of your own forces. ...But if you need to be absolutely certain that this mission will be completed, the odds of success and survival increase considerably if you send in two or more gods of war so they can cover for each other.”

“That’s true...”

“Right?” The Date Vice Chancellor leaned forward. “That’s how insane a feat it was to leave a stealth platform and board the enemy deck. And the enemy’s deck was prepared for a festival, but that could have been camouflage. They boldly charged down the deck while using their spears and cannons to destroy the ship-top structures. ...Instead of building aerial gods of war, Hexagone Française is sinking the enemy ships by challenging them to a ground battle while in the air.”

“Judge.” Gin nodded. “And from that we can conclude Hexagone Française’s platforms have a total length of-...”

“Wait.”

The Vice President interjected with a word and a hand.

...Huh?

Gin was confused by the sudden interruption.

She had no idea why she was being stopped with a hand.

But the Date Vice Chancellor spoke before she could say anything more.

“Date’s gods of war are aerial, but they are heavyweights even among heavy gods of war. Hexagone Française generally uses middleweights, but they should rival Date’s in weight when so heavily equipped. And Date’s god of war carriers

launch the gods of war with 300m catapult lanes.”

Hearing that, Gin realized why the Vice President had stopped her.

...Oh, that's right.

She had not yet lost the inherited name of Tachibana Gin and she was being handled as a transfer student from Tres España.

...That's right.

Muneshige had lost his inherited name and moved here, so he was a student of Musashi Ariadust Academy.

Gin was different.

So she could act as an adviser here, but she could not reveal more of Tres España's information than necessary.

Her estimation of the god of war firing platform was based on the specs of Tres España's god of war carriers and aerial gods of war.

That was information she could not provide.

And it would be dangerous for Musashi to hear it.

After all, that would mean they knew classified Tres Españan information.

So Gin lowered her head toward Musashi's Vice President and Date's Vice Chancellor.

“Judge. Thank you very much.”

“No, I was careless there. I can casually say what I want since Date is allied with Matsudaira, but Tres España is different,” said Date's Vice Chancellor. “But given Hexagone Française's god of war flight ability, how much do you think they could shorten the platform?”

Gin immediately opened her mouth when she realized what that question meant.

The Date Vice Chancellor's question was one almost anyone in a high-ranking combat role in Tres España could answer. After all...

“Tres España borders Hexagone Française, so they buy food from España and own a lot of España’s debt. We simulated countless battles with them and fought actual skirmishes on the provisional border,” she said. “But here we are talking about taking off at the end of a runway. Since they would want enough speed to take off from just within the effective range of the defense barriers, 100 meters should suffice.”

“This really changes the battlefield,” interrupted Naomasa while putting together the stones for the hot spring. “With a 100m platform and two gods of war, they can do significant damage to two warships. That kind of efficiency is going to make me cry.”

“El Azors can perform long-range fire, but they are lightly equipped and a direct attack on the bridge is only thought of as a last resort. ...This attack uses fairly heavily-equipped gods of war to directly board an aerial ship and charge the bridge. And if it comes from a stealth platform, no nation will be prepared for that.”

“Really?” Naomasa smiled bitterly. “We will, won’t we?”

Hearing that, Masazumi lowered her shoulders in a deceptive sigh.

“I guess we’ll have to be...”

“Oh, then we’re going to lose a ton of money again...”

That comment came from Heidi who was staying out of the river and instead picking plants from the slope and putting them in the basket on her back.

Naomasa glared at her.

“What are you doing?”

“Eh!? S-some of these are worth a lot! ...And these ones here are extremely poisonous, so they’re great for backroom deals!”

She sure hasn’t changed, thought Naomasa, but she decided to ask regardless.

“So what’s this about losing money?”

“Well, we can contact Oushuu a lot easier now, right? So we can have the IZUMO HQ produce a lot of equipment for use against Hexagone Française’s tactics.”

“That’s true enough.”

“Really?” asked Masazumi and Narumi silently stared at her, so Naomasa nodded.

Gin started to stand up to be polite, but Naomasa held out her prosthetic arm to stop her and explained to Masazumi.

“Listen. Musashi has Musashi IZUMO on it. And we also have the Asama Shrine, right? The Asama Shrine is closely related to Shirasago Enterprises, which can be seen as an IZUMO branch family. That said, the facilities in Musashi are small and they don’t have much personnel, so they can’t perform any major development, experimentation...or production. So...”

“After completing the planning and verification stages on Musashi, the actual development and production are left to the IZUMO HQ or Shirasago Enterprises, right?”

“Judge. We can also have IZUMO only do the development and have the production done in a surface reservation nearer the Musashi. ...That system has existed for a while, but it’s become a lot more important since England. And in a case like this, it’s especially useful.”

“That’s right,” said Heidi while sitting down on the slope. “If we can’t stay in close contact with IZUMO, the various machinery and materials have to be procured on site or replaced with some kind of substitute. When that happens, there’s a lot of room for merchants to intervene. But if using IZUMO to develop equipment for new tactics becomes the norm, the merchants who bought up a lot of materials in advance are going to be in trouble.”

“I see,” said Masazumi with a nod. Just then, she heard a voice from below the second waterfall located downstream.

“Heyyy!”

It was Toori.

Mitotsudaira placed the fish in the live-box and walked to the second waterfall.

The edge of the waterfall was stone with a thin layer of moss growing on it. She got on all fours to make sure she would not slip and she peered down along with Adele and Kimi.

It was a drop of eight meters.

There was a wide river below. It was contained within the valley, but the rocks forming the river were small and the riverbed was deep.

A few tents were set up on the sand and gravel riverbank.

And there was a swimsuit crossdresser in the light green waterfall basin.

Even if she was wearing a swimsuit, Mitotsudaira was hesitant to reveal so much skin to her king.

“What is it, my king?”

“Oh, Nate. Is that Adele and Sis with you?”

Adele gave an affirmative yell and waved her hand while Horizon approached her from behind.

Horizon suddenly crouched down and performed a tackle.

“Watch out, Adele-sama! ...is the name of the gag.”

The automaton slipped on the moss and her weight pushed both of them off the waterfall.

...Eh?

They fell. And in that instant, Mitotsudaira grabbed the back of the hard points on Horizon's hips.

“Nwah...!”

She pulled the two girls back up.

She got them to safety, but now she was slipping forward.

“Eh?”

She fell. And in that instant, Horizon and Kimi grabbed the back of the hard points on Mitotsudaira's hips.

"Hnnn...!"

They pulled her back up.

But due to the lack of a harness connecting the two hard points along the back of her hips, the swimsuit pulled past her butt and slipped down to her thighs.

"Kyaaaaahh!"

The water flowing toward the waterfall gathered between her slightly spread legs and pushed her further forward.

"Kimi-sama!" shouted Horizon to her right. "Grab her butt, not her chest! There's nothing to grab there!"

"I'm supposed to grab the left side, right!? And I massage it, right!?"

"What are you two doing!?"

Meanwhile, Mitotsudaira really did start falling.

"Kh...!"

She stuck her hands down toward the rock wall within the waterfall.

She was lucky the moss was so thick. She could dig her nails in for enough of a grip to push herself up.

She made it back on top.

Once back in a sitting position, she fixed her swimsuit and looked to the left and right.

On the right, Horizon did not hesitate to give her an expressionless thumbs up.

On the left, the idiot sister did not hesitate to begin a smiling dancing.

Why doesn't she slip and fall? wondered Mitotsudaira, but then Asama walked up next to them. She looked to Mitotsudaira with a bow and arrow in hand.

“Oh, thank goodness. People don’t often take a plunge from a waterfall while bottomless, so I wasn’t sure how to stop you.”

“What were you planning to do with that bow and arrow?”

Naruze, who was soaking her feet in the hot spring along with Naito, drew and held up an image of a fish pinned to the top of a waterfall by an arrow piercing it from above.

After looking back at it, it took Asama three seconds to realize what it meant. She quickly waved her hands back and forth.

“N-no! I was trying to fire it between Mito’s legs so her half-stripped swimsuit bottom would catch on it!”

“I don’t like the sound of that for several reasons!”

But Asama told her to calm down and looked to the bottom of the waterfall.

“Um, Toori-kun?”

“Yeah, I wanted to know if we can start a fire. There are a lot of local gods around here, right?”

“Yes,” confirmed Asama. “I asked the local gods to temporarily rent us this area. They agreed as long as I brought some divine sake from the Asama Shrine.”

“...You sure are thorough.”

“I have to be when we’re visiting the ruins and battling Celestial Dragons. Greeting the local gods means we don’t have to use any extra substitutions when routing through these gods to use our contracts.” She lowered her shoulders. “That said, I had actually already reached an agreement with the mountain spirits. Since the mountains here are connected to Asama. They all wanted the blessing of Asama.”

“Do you mean sake, Asama-sama?”

“Pretty much, yeah...”

Asama smiled bitterly.

Just then, a bamboo spear launcher fell from the sky and stabbed into the

ground in the middle of the group of boys constructing tents down below.

“Waaah!”

Mitotsudaira watched as Neshinbara immediately dashed away and only later looked back. Once he noticed the shape of the launcher, he struck a pose with enough force to produce a snapping sound from his sleeve.

“The enemy...!?”

...He’s come up with another weird game...

Behind Mitotsudaira, Kimi lifted up Mitotsudaira’s back hair which was being pushed toward her by the water. She could tell what the girl was doing without even looking back.

“Sideburns.”

Adele, your laughter boiling points is way too low.

But turning around would only make things worse, so she let Kimi do as she wished. She looked down and saw a torii-style indicator displayed on the side of the launcher.

It was labeled “**Sake Amount: Drink in moderation**” and the colored bar indicating the contents was shrinking.

“Won’t the land reek of alcohol after this?”

“They’ll drink every last drop, so that won’t be a problem. Once they’re done with it, it can be shared with the local people.”

“Heh heh. Being part of the Asama Shrine can’t be easy. This wasn’t really necessary for the study camp, after all. ...Yes, I know what this was! Asama’s outdoor spirit has opened up! Yes! Opened! Open, my outer door! Bring your euphemistic pickle and enter my hidden land! You lover of hidden lands! ... What are those looks of scorn for!? You want to see that badly!? Yahooooo!!!”

Your voice is echoing, so please stop that.

Mitotsudaira knew that turning around would be a very, very bad idea.

But Asama walked up next to her and spoke.

“Toori-kun, once the sake is gone, you can start a fire.”

“Sure. I’ll tell Tenzou. ...Horizon, the tent for all of you is ready, so go put your things in there later.”

“Judge. Toori-sama, that would be the tent for the two of us, wouldn’t it?”

The atmosphere froze.

Mitotsudaira realized everyone nearby had stopped moving.

That was of course only the ones close enough to have heard Horizon’s answer. Masazumi’s group was still debating something and Mary and Futayo could be heard fishing back at the waterfall basin.

...Oh, I can hear cicadas in the distance...

Behind her, Kimi moved around a bit and stuck her butt into Mitotsudaira’s hair.

“Hermit crab.”

Mitotsudaira really wanted to kick her away, but she was afraid it would make her slip and fall again.

Down below, Noriki gave the crossdresser a serious look.

“Toori.”

“Yeah?”

“Don’t die.”

“Y-you sure are direct!”

But it was Kimi who answered him.

“Now, now. He isn’t going to die. I mean, he has Mitotsudaira and me with him.”

Mitotsudaira felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Her face rapidly paled, but then it grew bright red even more rapidly. And when she opened her mouth...

“W-wait, u-u-umm.”

“Calm down. This is the same as coming to our house.”

“Yes, it would be the same environment,” said Horizon.

The automaton looked to Mitotsudaira and then looked behind her.

“You too, Asama-sama.”

Asama felt a sinking feeling in the pit of her stomach.

Her face rapidly paled, but then it grew bright red even more rapidly. And when she opened her mouth...

“N-no, um, wh-what are you talking about!?”

“Calm down. This is the same as when you stayed at Toori-sama’s house.”

“Yes, it would be the same situation,” said Kimi.

The idiot sister looked to Asama and then to Mitosudaira.

“But Horizon wasn’t there when Asama and Horizon slept over the other day.”

“Ah,” gasped Asama.

...That’s right...

“The other day... That would be the night when Neshinbara-kun was flattened. And the night before Tenzou-kun was feeling himself in a questionable way.”

10ZO: “Wh-what!? What is with this bizarre treatment I’m getting!?”

Scarred: “Don’t worry, Master Tenzou. Everyone understands.”

Almost Everyone: “Yeah, we understand all too well!!”

10ZO: “Enemies! You’re all my enemies, aren’t you!?”

The ninja grew suspicious of them all, but Asama ignored that.

She came to a belated understanding about Horizon. There was a lot they had to think about with the sharing and whatnot, but as they were...

...Horizon sees us as the ones with a deeper connection to Toori-kun.

Romance was not the only possible relationship between two people. So that made them more experienced than Horizon.

“You don’t have to worry about us, Horizon.”

Mitotsudaira stretched her leg out below the water to lightly kick Asama’s shin.

She was probably scolding Asama for being so withdrawn.

Asama appreciated the concern, but her foot slipped and she tripped.

She landed on top of Kimi and Mitotsudaira, so all three of them slid along the rocks at the top of the waterfall.

“Kyaaaaaahh!!”

Mitotsudaira forcibly held her ground and Horizon pulled them back.

After seeing Asama fall to her knees and gasp for breath, Horizon placed a hand on her shoulder.

“I find it hard to know what to do when you are trying to be considerate, Asama-sama.”

“Is that so...?”

Meanwhile, Hanami opened a sign frame. The local gods were finished drinking the sake down below.

So she brushed back her newly wet hair and peered down.

She spoke to the crossdresser.

“You can prepare a fire now. Also...”

She hung her head in exasperation before continuing.

“...I’ll leave the rest to Horizon.”

“Sure. I don’t really know what this is about, but if you wanna divide up the rooms like we’re living together, then let’s have fun with it. Also, Asama?”

“Yes?”

The crossdresser pulled something made of cloth and string from the river and placed it over his head like ears.

What is that? she wondered just as Kimi stroked a finger down her back.

“Outdoor.”

Once she caught on, Asama swallowed a scream and wrapped her arms around her body.

The wind blew across some wood flooring.

An evening sky was visible overhead.

The people on that floor sank into the evening colors provided by the sun which was now level with them to the west.

The floating floor was a ship’s deck.

This was the fourth ship of Hashiba’s Hexagone Française invasion fleet.

A festival was prepared on the deck and the stands were open for business. But their lights of activity illuminated uniformed students. The stands were preparing some light food, but they were also fully equipped with anti-god of war rifles and targeting spell charms.

“So the festival is continuing after preparing for enemy attack. Or is this meant as a night festival? I’m not sure. This is Katou Yoshiaki. I’m here to watch over the scuttling of the first and second ships.”

Gold wings danced across the bow plaza while holding a paper plate of dumplings.

She was flying toward someone positioned to face the setting sun.

“Takenaka, you explain it for me.”

Yoshiaki looked to Takenaka who was only wearing a P.A. Oda summer uniform.

She had her back to Yoshiaki and she was resting her elbows on the deck's railing.

She must not have had to worry about her skin with the sun nearly set because she was not wearing the M.H.R.R. coat she normally wore like a cloak.

Yoshiaki viewed the tall girl's bare back which, unlike her own, had no wings.

"Are you thinking?"

"Eh? Ohh, umm, I'm always thinking."

"I see." Yoshiaki stood to Takenaka's right and held up the paper plate of dumplings. "Want some?"

"Thank you."

Takenaka said that with a smile and took one.

Just one. She placed it in her smiling mouth and...

"Now, what is it you wanted to ask me?"

Takenaka must have had a good guess because she continued speaking.

"I think I've told you most everything about the invasion of Paris. Oh, and don't bother asking about what Hexagone Française is planning. I wouldn't have time to explain now, so I'll explain only after it happens."

...This girl.

She had always been like this, but it could be a problem how readily she kept secrets even from her own team.

But the thing was...

"If you say there wouldn't be time, then there really wouldn't be."

"I'm glad you understand. But is there something other than that you want to ask?"

"Why didn't you order us to join in while the gods of war and those two idiots were fighting?"

“You were asleep, weren’t you!? Fast asleep!”

“Everyone should get eight hours of sleep a day,” said Yoshiaki. “But if you had woken us up, we would have joined the fight.”

“Are you sure?”

“Testament,” confirmed Yoshiaki before eating a dumpling.

It was sweet. Specifically, a round sort of sweetness. She placed it in the back of her right cheek and savored its resilience as she bit into it.

“Sure, we would have been in a bad mood, we would have grumbled, we would have glared at you, we would have complained about it endlessly, and we would have ignored you for about two days...but we would have happily joined the fight.”

“And I don’t want any of that.”

“But you’re prepared to accept any high damage directed at you, aren’t you?”

“Well, yes,” replied a smiling Takenaka.

Yoshiaki sighed in her heart.

This was what made this tactician so fearsome.

When she had left her master’s house, she had calmly pretended to take over that house in a way that made everyone there her enemy. It had been an insane way of giving a warning to that lazy house, but it had to have been the most obvious method to her.

Takenaka did not hesitate to take extreme measures or to bring harm to themselves. If she was ever afraid to lose her own forces...

...It’s when she needs to hold them in reserve so they can be lost later.

So there was one thing Yoshiaki knew she could trust about this enemy attack.

“High damage. ...Why were Fukushima and Kiyomasa so badly hurt? You have them sleeping in the recovery room, don’t you? I just hope they aren’t still half asleep when they make an appearance to show they’re fine.”

“Yeah, those two were raised a little too well. They’re too strong for their own

good.”

Takenaka opened a *lernen figur*. Since she did not let Yoshiaki see, it was probably the order to scuttle the first and second ships.

In the distance, the first and second ships were ascending while also loaded with wreckage from the third ship. The surviving turretless cannons on the port and starboard sides were aimed straight up.

Takenaka spoke while looking up at their movements.

“I need everyone to be even stronger?”

“Why is that a question?”

“Because the part that requires you all to be stronger isn’t really my duty. I’m the tactician. If all of you are nice and strong, then my strategies will be really easy for you. But more than that...”

She said it.

“You all are a unit meant to oppose Musashi.”

I see, thought Yoshiaki.

“And those two lost.”

She knew what Takenaka was thinking.

“We’re strong, but we’re a bit lacking in experience. So Fukushima and Kiyomasa didn’t feel the proper impact of their losses at Mito and Novgorod. ... That’s what you mean, isn’t it?”

“Is it because you’re so kind that you understand that part, Yoshiaki-san?”

“Keep saying creepy things like that and I’m going to demand you pay for that dumpling.”

“Then I’ll have one more.”

Yoshiaki was reminded how fearsome a girl this was.

“To make sure they understood the meaning and reality of defeat, you had them fight someone other than our intended opponents and you had them

lose.”

Which accomplished...

“You made sure they felt just how inexperienced we are and that we’re not even at the level of some unintended opponents. That is amazingly condescending, but I suppose it’s all over for a tactician if she starts looking up to others.”

“That’s more or less what I was doing. ...Although to be honest, it didn’t work out as intended.”

“How so?”

“They actually defeated the gods of war,” quietly said Takenaka. “They were up against Hexagone Française aces while frolicking around in swimsuits and carrying spears. Is that supposed to be the bonus content for an RPG or something? I never thought they could win without any support. ...Especially Fukushima-san. Ichinotani can attack and defend if she uses it right, so it’s completely overpowered. But the greater the enemy’s firepower, the better it is. And then she starts using it during a battle with a god of war...”

“I can’t tell if you’re praising her or angry at her, so I’ll just say this: serves you right.”

“High daaaamage.”

“That is so not cute.”

Yoshiaki smiled bitterly at Takenaka who laid her head down on the railing.

“But I hear someone really dangerous showed up. Katou Danzou, was it? ... Couldn’t he be even more trouble than Musashi?”

“He’s definitely working with Hexagone Française,” said Takenaka. “Okay, I guess I can tell you. He has a connection to all of us. He’s pretty much a monster, but that’s exactly why he’s the perfect opponent for Fukushima-san and Kiyomasa-san.”

Takenaka straightened up.

She looked to the setting sun. The damaged ironclad ships were rising in front of that light.

“That should do it.”

With that, Takenaka reached for a corner of her *lernen figur*.

As soon as she did, a waterfall of light rose from the night sky with the purple heavens in the background.

The first and second ships had fired their turretless cannons into the sky.

The light rose several hundred meters.

“Ohh, exactly as I calculated.”

The launched light projectiles changed direction as if they had stalled.

They started down and fell right toward the first and second ships that had fired them.

“Enjoy the fireworks.”

The collision destroyed the two ships.

The first and second ships were scuttled.

To increase the effect of the shells, the material below the deck and other structures had been removed. So when the light hit the two ships, the internal power readily escaped from the hull and they split apart.

They shattered with a deafening roar. Yoshiaki sighed and spoke as she looked up at the light.

“...Are you showing that we can do this to attack any gods of war that might board us in the future?”

“Nooope. Fireworks. These are fireworks. After all...”

Takenaka spun around.

She looked to the people returning to the rebuilt festival. They were here to watch the explosive destruction of the first and second ships. Everyone in the stands cheered, too.

“...!”

They all raised their right forearms to salute the scattering ships.

“I see.” Yoshiaki ate the last dumpling. “In the Far East, a festival is used to summon that land’s god and have it purify all of the impurities in the land and in the participants.”

Now.

“This would’ve been perfect if Nagayasu was here.”

Chapter 48: Girl Approaching in Bed

第四十八章

『寢床の近寄り娘』



そんなことはない
と信じるのではなく
証明しようと
配点 (誓い)

How do you prove

It isn't true

Instead of just believing it?

Point Allocation (An Oath)

Mitotsudaira was having trouble sleeping as the night wore on.

She was inside a tent.

A non-lit sign frame was opened at the top of the tent to display the stars above.

It was a moonless night. Perhaps because they were in the mountains, the stars were brighter and more numerous than on the Musashi.

Mitotsudaira was not a species whose body was activated by starlight, so she simply found the stars to be pretty and sensed how vast that starry expanse was.

She knew people had once lived, died, and passed things down within that expanse.

...It's strange.

The people of that vast and unrestricted world now had trouble leaving the Far East. People called that the decline of the species, but they had also put together a plan to resist it.

"...The Anti-Decline Pro-Tuning Project."

Thousands of years ago, the people had created the Testament and established those rules.

Thinking back, Mitotsudaira wondered if those people had been similar to Musashi now. After all, the rules they had established were a pain, but they had a clear goal.

...To make sure they don't lose anything more.

Of course, people would be lost if the history recreation was strictly followed.

But even the head of the Catholics, who were seen as history itself, had used the word “interpretations”.

When used in a positive way, interpretations were a way of saying you wanted to keep living.

And...

“— — — —”

The king who had used them and the princess who had been saved by them were next to her now.

Right next to her.

...Th-this does not put me “in front”!

She should have been lying above her king’s head, but Kimi had taken that spot first.

From there, the structure of the tent had forced her to place her blanket alongside him, which made her tremble. The princess and then Asama were on his other side.

“Nn...”

Asama was occasionally turning over, but she was definitely awake. There was no doubt about it.

As for the idiot...

“Zzz.”

He was fast asleep and lightly snoring.

His arms were spread and the right one was extended toward her head, but was that what was known as a “pillow judge”? She noticed Horizon was carelessly doing the same thing in her sleep, but...

...Why are her eyes open!?

Mitotsudaira recalled hearing something about “security”, but did she always sleep like that? However...

“...Eh?”

While lying on her back, Mitotsudaira felt fingers on her left hip. That was the one positioned alongside him.

Five fingers crawled along her as if trying to pull up the hem of her pajamas.

...My king!?

Mitotsudaira's heart began pounding. He was right there next to her, but...

...W-wasn't his arm under my head!?

She quickly shook her head to check, but his arm had vanished.

Her head hit the floor hard enough to produce a dull thud even through the mat they had laid out.

"Nh...!"

As she held her breath and groaned, her squirming allowed the fingers on her hip to move inward.

...Hyah!

The pajamas were pulled back to the left, exposing the area from her left thigh to her lower stomach.

...W-wait, my king!

A voice just about escaped her lips, but she suppressed it.

Horizon was asleep and Asama was working hard to pretend she was too. If she let out a strange moan here, those two would realize what he was up to and things might get very bloody. For him.

So should she do her best to suppress her voice?

"Kh..."

A variety of thoughts came to mind, such as "why?" and "what is going on?"

She could have mentally prepared herself in a more normal situation, but doing it here would be an inexcusable act against her friends Asama, Horizon, and Kimi.

But at the same time, she was unable to resist.

She both wanted him to get it over with and to do it properly, but she also told herself this was best for her friends.

While making that excuse to herself, she spoke to Asama who was still awake.

If Asama noticed, Mitotsudaira could give up on some things and make some decisions about this.

“T-Tomo...”

There was a response.

Asama rolled over in a blatant act.

“Nn... No, Mito... Not so much...meat...”

She went limp in an impressive attempt to feign sleep.

What kind of character am I in her head?

But then the fingers suddenly resumed their attack. Inside Mitotsudaira’s pajamas they moved down and between her thighs where she was not wearing anything.

“Kh...!”

She tried to say “wait”. If he was going to go this far, she was going to have her say first. So she grabbed the arm, turned toward him, and pulled the arm out.

“Eh?”

The arm completely detached.

She raised her hands within the dark tent and saw a disembodied right arm.

The forearm bent in the darkness as it swam through the air and clawed at nothing.

It was Horizon’s right arm.

“———!!!”

Mitotsudaira suppressed a scream while holding up the arm that flailed around like a struggling insect.

...Kwaahh!!!

After her misunderstanding and the resultant excitement, this was a letdown in a number of ways.

She crossed out everything in her mind and mentally prostrated herself before her king about ten times. Her mental image of him forgave her after that, so she managed to regain her cool.

...B-but what is going on!?

She realized that her king had not actually lowered the arm she had been using as a pillow.

A closer look showed he had stretched it upwards instead. She had not noticed it before because Kimi was holding it between her arms.

“Nn...foolish brother...no, quit teasing my hair.”

...What kind of dream are you having!?

Angry, Mitotsudaira yanked her king's arm away and gave Kimi Horizon's arm instead.

Kimi liked to hold things in her sleep, so she got a tight grip on Horizon's arm which struggled to escape. But the idiot sister...

“Nn, no... C-c'mon, foolish brother, this isn't time for the eel game...”

What kind of game is that? wondered Mitotsudaira, but it sounded like something those siblings really would do.

At any rate, Horizon's arm and Kimi's grasp canceled each other out.

Mitotsudaira took a breath and sat up, wondering what to do.

“———!!!”

Asama raised a voiceless scream and sat up holding an arm.

The shrine maiden's heart was clearly pounding, so Mitotsudaira held out her right hand.

“There's someone over here who wants that, so I'll take it.”

Asama caught her breath, fixed her clothing, and wrapped her blanket back around herself.

...Wow, that was a surprise.

She had known his arm was sticking out past Horizon so she could rest her head on it. So when she had felt fingers crawling across her chest, only one possibility had come to mind.

...Honestly.

She felt silly for trying to suppress her voice like that.

He was simply asleep and so was Horizon. As she realized only she had been thrown off balance, a non-lit sign frame appeared next to her head below the blanket.

Silver Wolf: “Can you not sleep?”

Since she did not ask “Are you up?”, Mitotsudaira must have known all along. So...

Asama: “Can you not either?”

Silver Wolf: “Judge. I kind of want to say ‘as usual’. But what was that with Horizon’s arms...?”

Asama: “At night, her arms apparently detach to autonomously do housework and prepare for the morning. They were probably doing that like normal, but they didn’t know where they were and they started feeling around to figure that out. ...They should automatically enter sleep mode once they run out of fuel, so we can leave them be.”

The sister was making odd noises, but they ignored it since she seemed to be enjoying herself. However...

Vice President: “Hey, is anyone awake?”

Scarred: “Judge. I am. Master Tenzou was teaching me about the stars.”

Mal-Ga: “You two sure are close for being in different tents.”

10ZO: “N-no, um, that’s...Is Toori-dono still alive!?”

Silver Wolf: “What do you think is happening over here!?”

Pondering that question too much would only increase her impurity meter, so Asama decided not to. When she poked her head out from under her blanket, she saw a few arguing sign frames next to his and her sleeping faces. It was only text, but it would still interrupt their sleep if they noticed. So...

Asama: “Toori-kun and Horizon are asleep, so please keep it down.”

The blanket made it hard to type, so she pulled the blanket toward the outer edge of the tent and opened a sign frame below that. And...

Asama: “Masazumi...did you need something?”

Vice President: “Yes, it’s about tomorrow.”

Masazumi gave her answer.

Vice President: “We will be entering the Sanada ruins tomorrow morning. Principal Sakai said Class 3-Plum’s mission for the study camp is to see ‘something’ in the depths of those ruins. We’re prepared for that and everyone understands what we’re doing, but...still.”

Asama understood why Masazumi was worried.

Asama: “I heard about that at dinner. Twenty-odd years ago, after Principal Sakai visited those ruins, they were given to a certain individual. But fifteen years ago, Principal Sakai destroyed them.”

And who was that individual?

Asama: “Matsudaira Nobuyasu. ...Lord Motonobu’s younger brother.”

Masazumi sat up when she saw Asama’s words.

The sign frame on the tent ceiling displayed the sky above and that starlight illuminated some others who had sat up: Adele, Gin, and Narumi.

And a pale light revealed some silhouettes on the other side of the cloth wall to the left.

Vice President: “Crossunite’s group? What are you doing with a light on?”

10ZO: “W-well, Uqui-dono had captured a rhino beetle, but then it disappeared. Later, when we were eating snacks and discussing porn,

Neshinbara-dono rolled over and we heard a crunch. ...So we had to see whether it was a snack or if he was a bug murderer.”

What an unpleasant kind of excitement. But...

Vice President: “Oh, right. It doesn’t seem like much to Futayo or me since we grew up in Mikawa, but things like rhino beetles are a rare sight for the rest of you.”

That would explain why Futayo and Mary had been the ones in charge of fishing. However...

Vice President: “I’m pretty nervous about this ruins expedition, but the rest of you are probably fairly used to *that kind of thing*.”

Gold Mar: “Yeah, Musashi is kind of like a dungeon when you go deep underground.”

Mal-Ga: “And with mysterious phenomena, you get to battle monsters from time to time.”

I see, thought Masazumi as she remembered something like that had happened in the past. In that case...

Vice President: “Can I leave this to all of you?”

Silver Wolf: “Have you forgotten we defeated a Terrestrial Dragon last night?”

She had not.

But they had to fight two Celestial Dragons in a row next time. And in their territory.

...Still...

“How can she sleep?”

Gin was talking about Futayo who was asleep with Tonbo Spare in her arms. She had let her hair down and she was barely contained in her blanket anymore.

“She’s always been able to sleep anywhere.”

“I’m not sure if I should call that hardy or insensitive...”

Gin must have had a variety of thoughts on the matter.

But then Narumi faced Masazumi.

“To be honest, there’s a lot I don’t understand about what your Principal said. I understand the things like Lord Nobuyasu’s suicide that were in the Testament, but what exactly are these Sanada ruins?”

“I don’t understand any of that either...”

Masazumi thought over what Sakai had said and what the Testament said.

Vice President: “This goes back to twenty or so years ago.”

“At the time, I passed through here to pick a fight with Innocentius.”

A clearing with an excellent view of the night sky had four wooden cabins with “School Faculty Only” signs hanging on them.

Sakai sat at one of the wooden tables and chairs set up around that clearing. The table had a sake pitcher and a sake glass on it.

“And you know what happened then, ‘Musashi’-san?”

He was speaking to a sign frame on the table. It displayed “Musashi” who was operating a few different sign frames.

“The records from the time say you went out of your way to move from Mikawa to the Edo region. From there, you circled around to the north in order to hit K.P.A. Italia from behind. Over.”

“Right, right. I went to Edo for some fun. While Ii, Sakakibara, and the others were having fun at Edo’s Akihabara, I snuck out through here. And I was caught by Sanada.”

“Caught? Over.”

“Sanada was having some internal trouble at the time, so they needed some outside help.” Sakai took a sip of sake. “That was a difficult time.”

“The records say you mostly traveled along the surface, but couldn’t you have used an aerial ship? Over.”

“Yeah, but I wasn’t too fond of aerial ships back then.”

“Ho ho? Over.”

Oh, that speech style, thought Sakai with a hand on his chin. He also grabbed some of the leftover yakiniku chicken that he had prepared as a snack.

“But, well, that was the first time. And that’s when the current ‘ruins’ were opened up. They were placed under Edo’s management.”

“And Edo’s manager at the time was...”

“Matsudaira Nobuyasu. Lord-sensei’s younger brother. The Testament said he was supposed to live at Okazaki Castle, but Mikawa’s neutrality requirements were really strict and a relative wasn’t allowed in neighboring Okazaki. That’s why he ended up in charge of Edo where Matsudaira would be later on. But that’s why we never had any trouble going to Edo for some fun,” said Sakai. “Lord-sensei and Brother-sensei apparently used those ruins for a lot of things, but I’m something of a delinquent.”

“I am well aware. Over.”

“Judge,” said Sakai as he nodded and looked up into the sky.

It was night. The stars were visible in the heavens, but he looked straight up, as if to look past even them.

“And that all led to Brother-sensei’s suicide.”

Vice President: “All of you should more or less understand that part.”

Masazumi saw everyone’s reactions to what she said.

Silver Wolf: “Judge, I have heard about that. Principal Sakai was a leading member of Mikawa but he failed to stop Lord Nobuyasu’s suicide, so he was demoted and sent to Edo...”

Smoking Girl: “How is someone in Mikawa supposed to stop someone in Edo from committing suicide?”

Naomasa seemed awfully fired up, but was that because they were speaking late at night?

This was a silent sign frame, so Masazumi could hear the insects chirping, the occasional rustling of underbrush from a mountain animal, and the waterfalls.

The surface is noisier than I remember, she realized. And...

Vice President: “But did anyone think that thirty-year-old story was connected to a fifty-year-old one?”

Namely...

Vice President: “Fifty years ago, the early recreation of a Far Eastern Catholic rebellion was held at Shimabara. And twenty years later – which is thirty years ago now, okay? – the remnants of those Catholics held a second rebellion in a certain place.”

And that place was...

Vice President: “That rebellion thirty years ago was held at the Sanada Ruins we’re visiting tomorrow.”

“I still don’t really understand,” said Sakai. “According to Sasuke and the others, after their loss 800 years ago, they lost again 400 years ago and the dragons leaving Europe split between the east and the west. The ones that scattered in the east were Sasuke and the others. And the ones that scattered in the west went to the warmer Shimabara region after the Harmonic Unification War. So the dragons that lost yet again during the Shimabara Rebellion fifty years ago came here. Sasuke and the others said they let those dragons live in the ruins that had been left alone since they had first moved to Sanada. But...”

“But what? Over.”

“Well, you see.” Sakai scratched his head. “There’s a lot I don’t understand. For example, it wasn’t just dragons that fought in the Shimabara Rebellion. But when I visited twenty-odd years ago, the only survivors were a dozen or so Terrestrial Dragons. That was after Lord-sensei’s second suppression, so at the time, I just thought that was how it was.”

“...Are you suggesting they left to go somewhere else?”

“...I have no proof, though. Still, Sasuke and the others had to have known that Lord-sensei had ‘suppressed’ them thirty years before. Masayuki-san and the others didn’t interfere so as not to upset Lord-sensei, but I’m sure Sasuke and the others understood the truth of the matter. They didn’t tell me...but maybe they will now that they’re facing their final days. Is it wrong of me to think of it that way?”

“That is no more than the masochism of someone who is barely involved anymore,” said “Musashi”. “You said Sasuke-sama and the others entered the ruins and the Shimabara survivors used the ruins after Sasuke-sama’s group moved to Sanada. However, what were they doing there until they began a rebellion and were suppressed thirty years ago? Over.”

“I don’t know. It seems Sasuke and the others don’t know either. And after the suppression, the survivors living in the ruins...well, let’s just say you couldn’t call them survivors anymore.”

Hearing that, “Musashi” went through the motions of a sigh.

“I more or less know the reason why, but in a way, this means it was your fault that we lost some valuable witnesses of history. Over.”

“As I said, I just thought that was how it was.”

And...

“This time, it looks like it’s Sasuke’s group that wants things to be that way.”

On the other side of the clearing, Oriotorai and Sanyou walked in front of a wood cabin. They were carrying a telescope bearing the Fino Alba logo, so they were probably on their way to do some astronomical observation.

Oriotorai gave him a light bow, so Sakai waved back.

“...For the rest, it would probably be faster to go ask them yourself.”

“I do not understand why you will not tell me. Over.”

“Yeah, I suppose not.” Sakai rested his head in his hand. “The problem is I don’t know where it begins or where it leads. Does it mean I’m getting old that I can’t stand not having a clear picture of that?”

“I believe rejecting the unreasonable is a privilege of the young,” said

“Musashi”. “Thus, as I am zero-years-old after my renewal, I will reject your unreasonable refusal. You do not have to tell anyone else, but please tell me what you know. Over.”

Scarred: “There are some things about that I don’t understand.”

Tenzou nodded in agreement with Mary. Next to him, Noriki was silently lying down and looking up at the stars. Neshinbara and Urquiaga were searching for the rhino beetle, but Tenzou could not care less.

He was not sure if he was right or wrong to be joining a meeting so late at night, but...

10ZO: “What don’t you understand, Mary-dono?”

Scarred: “Judge. From what I heard, Edo was being managed by...Lord Nobuyasu was it? But according to the records, it wasn’t him that suppressed the Second Shimabara Rebellion thirty years ago.”

Tenzou nodded at Mary’s words.

This is what was left in the official records, he thought as he gave the name.

10ZO: “Lord Matsudaira Motonobu. So thirty years ago, it was Horizon’s father, Lord Motonobu, who managed Edo and not his younger brother, Lord Nobuyasu.”

Unturning: “Maybe he suppressed the Second Shimabara Rebellion and then left Edo with his brother. The official records say the Testament Union arranged it, but I think we can assume he did it himself as the Yes Man.”

This would be a somewhat awkward topic if Horizon-dono was awake, thought Tenzou.

But saying it anyway may have been Narumi’s way of doing things.

And her view was not wrong.

...If he suppressed a Catholic rebellion, the primarily-Catholic Testament Union wouldn’t let him hear the end of it.

So he had abandoned his control of Edo and sent in a close relative instead.

But, thought Tenzou.

10ZO: “I’m surprised that was enough to placate the Catholics after their own had been harmed.”

Marube-ya: “What!? Are we talking about money!?”

Gold Mar: “Maybe it had to do with how many dragons were in the Shimabara forces?”

Novice: “No, I don’t think it was because there were so few humans at Shimabara. ...I hope our visit to the ruins sheds some light on this issue.”

Tenzou turned toward Neshinbara.

“Did you find the rhino beetle?”

“Yeah. Your drinking water must be nutritious, Crossunite-kun, because it was in your cup.”

“I-I was just drinking from that!”

“Now, now.” Neshinbara held his hands out to stop Tenzou before standing up and opening the tent’s entrance to let the bug out.

Novice: “By my estimation, our visit to the ruins tomorrow will amount to a hiking trip. But I can’t say much of anything about the battles once we are there.”

“Besides,” he said.

Novice: “Remember what Principal Sakai said? In accordance with Lord Nobuyasu’s will after his suicide, the ruins were destroyed. ...There won’t be much for us to see. So the battles are going to be very localized.”

Tachibana Wife: “That will be for us to decide.”

“But,” continued Muneshige.

Tachibana Husband: “What is inside these ruins?”

Someone responded to that question.

Asama: “There’s a bit of a problem there.”

Asama typed out her words while lying on her side.

Behind her, Mitotsudaira was awake with him and Horizon between. She could sense the girl's presence.

Asama: "Calling them ruins might make you think they're from the Age of the Gods, but it seems the Sanada ruins are not that old. Shinto has no records of or registration for them."

Silver Wolf: "? Then are they historical ruins?"

All this terminology is confusing, she thought, but there was no helping that.

She tried to keep it as simple as possible.

Asama: "We've heard of nonexistent ruins before, haven't we? The Divinely Ordained Prayer Academies. ...Those academies, such as the one below Novgorod, exist across the Far East. Couldn't one of those be the Sanada ruins?"

Also...

Asama: "Remember what the Prince of Orange said before he disappeared below Novgorod? Thirty years ago, there was a two-year period where talented people from around the world were gathered in an attempt to create a Testament Cross-Borders Unit. And..."

And...

Asama: "There they met the Princess. ...Couldn't that have happened at the Sanada ruins we're about to visit?"

I see, thought Masazumi. *The date of thirty years ago and the idea of an academy both match.*

...Then is that really what this is?

If so, what were they doing there? she wondered. But...

"...?"

"What is it, Vice President?" asked Adele with her hair down.

"I feel like something is out of place or doesn't quite fit together."

She could not quite place her finger on it, but she felt like something did not fit or they were overlooking something. And it seemed the others felt the same.

Bell: What...is it? I feel like...we're missing...something."

After a while, Mukai spoke.

Bell: "Because...Principal Sakai...said he doesn't...understand."

That's it, thought Masazumi.

Sakai kept saying the same thing about this.

...He doesn't understand.

Sakai had seen inside the ruins, so if Asama was right, he would have "understood" once he received their information from Novgorod.

Then what was it Sakai did not understand? There was one thing they could say.

Asama: "Does this mean we're standing at the entrance to the mystery just like Principal Sakai?"

Asama felt a twisting in her chest.

...We can't jump to conclusions.

What had happened below Novgorod had been submitted to IZUMO and IZUMO was investigating it.

She had been the one to put together the report on what they had seen there, so it was easy for this kind of situation to remind her of it.

But if she just assumed she was right or made speculations based on other speculations, her reasoning would stray further and further from reality.

She could not let that happen.

She was still not suited for these kinds of discussions when she was not simply reciting historical facts. That realization made her sigh.

But in the end, they were all the same.

She looked back to the divine chat:

Uqui: “There is no point in wasting our effort discussing things we don’t know and things we might learn tomorrow. We should get to sleep.”

Some agreed with him and others continued chatting. Mary and Tenzou resumed discussing the stars, and Asama’s tent...

Asama: “Mito, are you still up?”

Silver Wolf: “Y-yes, I am.”

Then let’s talk about something, she decided.

“Nn...”

But she heard someone stirring.

Toori had woken up.

Mitotsudaira was lying on her side with her back to him, but he was right there.

She panicked but tensed up so she would not make a noise.

She held the blanket between her arms and hid the sign frame behind it. Asama had to be doing the same thing.

Behind her, he sat up and took a sleepy breath.

The deep breath told her he was still half asleep.

But then she heard his voice.

“Oh, that’s not good...”

Eh? she thought. *What’s not good?* And then...

“There.”

With that, she felt something warm on her body.

It was his blanket.

He must have turned it sideways so it fit across her, her king, Horizon, and Asama. After adjusting it, he laughed bitterly. He had realized their feet stuck out now that it was on its side.

"I'm useless," he said with self-deprecation in his voice.

Mitotsudaira mentally replied to what his comment meant.

...Useless...!?

She considered getting up.

She wanted to tell him that was not true.

She wanted to tell him he was doing more than enough already.

But...

"I need to pull it together."

"_____"

Mitotsudaira could not say anything to her king's words.

What did he have to pull together?

He had Horizon, he had his sister, and now he had two extra people with him.

He's already accepted our impossibilities, so what more is he planning to accept?

But he said nothing more and collapsed back down.

He spread his arms, lay on his back, and bent his head back.

"Zzz..."

Before long, he was snoring again.

Mitotsudaira cried as she listened to him breathe.

She felt these tears were selfish and deceptive, but while thinking about that natural breathing behind her, she allowed the drops to freely flow sideways from her eyes.

.../...

The edge of the blanket did not fully cover her, but when she pulled on it...

"..."

Something was holding it in place on the other end.

That something was Asama. She pulled back as if to answer Mitotsudaira's tug.

And Mitotsudaira realized this blanket was an indulgence. It was normally his, but he had given it to them and he was accepting some difficulties in order to accept them.

Mitotsudaira had trouble indulging in things.

But if her king was giving it to her and accepting some difficulties in exchange...

...A knight must not indulge in anything that makes her king feel like that.

Mitotsudaira decided that was why she was crying.

...From now on...

I need to work hard enough that my king will not receive any blame or difficulties even if he lets his knight indulge in something like this.

That was what she thought.

She wiped away her tears while still pretending to sleep.

She turned over to face her king and moved closer to him.

She scooted over to her king so that the edge of the blanket would cover as much of her as possible.

Chapter 49: Inspired Boy in a Soundless Space

第四十九章

『音無し広間の奮起少年』

頑張ろうと思うより
やることを尽くそう
たとえどう見られても
配点 (どう見られたか)



Instead of trying to do my best

I want to do everything I can

No matter how it makes me look

Point Allocation (How did it make me look?)

Steam filled a closed room.

It was a bath. The walls and floor of the thirty-square-meter room were a pale blue.

But the bath was not functioning at the moment. The tap's water had stopped and something stood out more than the steam.

"...I just can't seem to narrow it down any further."

There was a total of fifteen *lernen figur* spread out in every direction, including the vertical directions.

All of them were facing a boy who sat a bit back from the center of the bathtub.

It was Katagiri. He sat on the edge of the tub with a towel around his waist and his eyes closed.

"Begin."

A pair of headphones hung down from his neck and that word triggered some noise.

All of the *lernen figur* facing him began to vibrate and they reproduced the sound data recorded from every direction.

It only lasted an instant.

The noise they produced was a quiet one.

And Katagiri's right hand suddenly trembled.

Then a loud sound played.

It was the sound of leaves. But the sound of branches rubbing together and leaves rustling was so loud that it destroyed the air. It reverberated through the

bath like an exploding stream of sand.

“Stop.”

His words erased all of that noise.

Then he placed the headphones on his ears and began controlling the *lernen figur*.

“I think this is about the spot...”

He checked a time graph of the volume level displayed as a wave. He zoomed in on one spot and stretched out the time scale. As he did so, he used a few Testament Kunst to apply acoustic spells that cleared up the sound.

“Oops.”

But he made it too clear.

He could return it to normal by canceling one of the acoustic Testament Kunst, but that would mean wasting a spell. Catholic spells were one-use. He felt bad about wasting it, but he removed it anyway.

Once he did, one wave shot upwards on the *lernen figur*.

He confirmed that the waveform was a long trapezoid that rose just a bit to the right.

“Yes...”

Katagiri removed his headphones as he raised both arms overhead.

Banzai. After a pause like that, he collapsed backwards. The headphones fell to the floor, but his body made a wet slapping sound as it hit the water inside the bathtub.

“Toh.”

Katagiri let his upper body fall back-first into the bathwater, but he did not sink. He kept his legs tense to support himself so he could lie just a bit below the warm water’s surface.

...Okay.

He had done what he could.

When he had seen Fukushima and Kiyomasa's battle that morning and heard the result, he had felt motivation build inside him.

...I have to do something.

So he had begun investigating something that had caught his attention the night before.

"I'm the only one that can do this."

He thought back to what the Asama shrine maiden had told him. This ability was his alone and it was something other than negotiating.

"The highly-sensitive detection and comprehension of sound."

This ability was necessary for stealth cruising and enemy detection. On an aerial ship, the automatons would handle it, but it was his role within the Ten Spears.

He was sometimes thankful for his excellent senses, but it was nothing but trouble at other times. But at the moment...

"Hundred Crest Land Survey."

A *Klassisch Kunst lernen figur* shattered and ripples appeared on the water's surface.

The patterns on the water stroked across his body, but...

"Lu..."

As he hummed, they slowly swelled up and took form.

This was the Hundred Crest Land Survey.

The spell gathered the sounds he heard inside himself and gave them form outside of him. It generally took the form of wind or light and it could be used to provide instructions or messages to his companions under most any circumstances. However...

"I knew it."

The corners of his lips rose as he looked up to see a feminine silhouette.

The bathwater rose up to create the image of a girl that filled his mind.

The overall form was a bit unclear, but there were definite breasts and the face and neck were recognizable. He knew who this girl was, but...

“Why am I so preoccupied with someone I only spoke to for a few minutes?”

He did not understand.

So he reached out his right hand to figure it out. He tried touching her as she looked down at him from the air.

She was bathwater. She felt just like water with a warmth similar to human skin. However...

“Yeah...”

He was a little surprised that he was trying to touch her.

This information came from inside him. It was meant to be sent to someone else. Since it had come from him, it would have the “correct” form from his point of view.

So there was nothing he could confirm or learn by touching it.

But touching her had filled him with the same sense of liberation as completing a task.

“I really do want to know more.”

This answer came from inside him, but he still had to touch it to learn more about it.

His motivation itself seemed clear enough.

“Something only I can do.”

She may have only thought she was giving him some simple advice. A shrine maiden would also be consulted through *ema* and prayers. She may have only given him a boilerplate response.

But if those words hit the mark, they could still change something.

“—————”

Katagiri destroyed the bathwater.

He then worked at using the steam to create a different internal answer.

“A diagram of this morning’s attack.”

The density of the steam created a clear image of the pool where Katagiri had been and all the way to the gods of war making their charge on the first ship.

It was scaled for viewing from his position lying back in the bath. It was also compressed in each direction, but the front to back compression was especially large. The steam images clearly extended into the distance like a row of *kakiwari* backdrops in Kabuki.

Some parts of the festival were a little poorly made, but he would be able to make a better version using the ship’s external observation data.

Also...

“Begin.”

With that, the steam began to move. The floating smoke accurately represented the movements of the gods of war and the opposing movements of Fukushima and Kiyomasa.

...Their battles are never normal.

Humans had defeated gods of war.

Gods of war were meant to be used against opponents too powerful for humans or to utterly rout a human force.

The beings meant to be denied by gods of war had instead denied the gods of war by force.

At least two of his companions could be described in such unbelievable terms.

In fact, almost all of the Ten Spears were at that level.

And yet...

“...Fukushima-san and Kiyomasa-san weren’t satisfied, were they?”

Not even he fully understood how Katou Danzou’s attack had worked. At some points his perception had not matched what was really happening and at other times it had. Without a tactical point of view or an expert opinion on spells, he could not even tell whether or not he was fooling himself here.

But as the replayed battle reached its conclusion, Fukushima was weeping and Kiyomasa was injured.

...They poured everything they had into what they could do there, but we still lost.

That brought a thought to Katagiri's mind.

"I need to do everything I can."

His Hundred Crest Land Survey was a spell for replay analysis and information transmission.

But there had to be lots of things he could do with that. And...

"Will the things I can do be enough to support everyone?"

He had to phrase it as a question because he was uncertain.

However, he had no one to ask and no one to give him an answer. So...

"Right."

The steam gathered together and once more created an image of her.

That girl showed him the way to solving his usual problems.

...If I could speak with her...

He wanted to tell her he had started giving these things some thought and doing what he could.

It might be too late now that his companions had lost and he did not know if this was the right answer, but...

"I've started," he said to the smiling girl made of bathwater. "Huh?"

But then he realized the image was different from earlier.

Katagiri realized the breast size was different.

...Huh? This puts her on the same level as Kiyomasa-san or Nagayasu-san...

What am I doing? he thought.

This was rude to everyone involved. He could not be doing this.

So he worked to change the image.

“...Nh?”

Now she was the same size as Fukushima.

That was not good either.

He was apparently hesitant to create the correct answer, so he was drawing on other nearby memories.

He could not keep doing this, so...

...W-was it about halfway in between...?

He tried it.

It worked well.

Okay, he told himself with a nod as he reached out toward the bathwater creation.

“...No!”

This isn't why I drew out the correct answer.

...Then why did I?

To enjoy looking at her? That seemed wrong somehow too. No, if he had drawn out the correct answer in order to convey his thoughts, there was only one way to describe it: “Faith...”

Yes, this is faith.

That's a good excuse.

No, I can't call it an excuse. This is my faith. Yes, that's what it is.

And it's a proper faith. There are those pedophiles who call themselves life worshipers, but this is completely different.

...After all, my religion believes in getting advice from lewd and busty shrine maidens!

“Wait, no...!!”

He was conflicted.

That isn't right at all. Lewd and busty have nothing to do with my faith.

Yes, I'm just worshiping an individual. That's all it has to be.

Okay, he told himself with a nod as he reached out toward the bathwater creation.

“...I mustn't touch the target of my faith!!”

Even the Catholics got in arguments over whether or not you could kiss a cross. Some factions used the kiss as a sign of affection, but that led some of them to take that sign further to show just how deep their affection was. They would stick it in their mouth and suck on it. There were far too many cases of people taking it way too far and needing a trip to a medical facility.

Crosses are dangerous, but water should be fine.

No, wait.

That's not the point. He waved his hand, but then his feet slipped.

“Hwoh.”

His upper body sank into the water.

Oh, no, he thought as he quickly tensed his legs.

...Nh!

His long, wet hair felt heavy as he formed a bridge with his legs a bit higher up.

And just then...

“Katagiri-sama? I hate to do this two days in a row, but we just finished our recovery interview. It would be great if we could take a bath now.”

Kiyomasa and Fukushima opened the door to the bath.

Kiyomasa saw it while pulling on Fukushima's hand.

She had opened the door to the bath. It was the officer's bath, but on this ship, that effectively made it exclusive to the Ten Spears.

It was always at the top of the list of places the warriors wanted to see, but...

“...”

She saw something on the tiled edge of the bath.

Katagiri was naked, his legs were spread toward them, and he was leaning back into the bath.

It was an impressive bridge.

Kiyomasa slammed the door shut.

“Wh-what was that for, Kiyono-dono!?”

Kiyomasa answered Fukushima’s question with a smile and a shake of the head.

“He should not be doing that.”

“Eh? D-doing what?”

“He should not be doing that even if he has a good reason, but he especially should not if he does not have a good reason.”

“What are thou talking about? Thou need to tell me if you want me to understand.”

“Good point...” Kiyomasa placed a hand on her chin. “To put it delicately...”

She could not exactly say he had his legs spread while he performed a bridge and thrust himself toward the sky. The thought alone was making her blush. However...

...He is a boy, after all.

They might mess around like that when they were under a lot of stress.

But that pointed to a certain fact.

...Something unpleasant must have happened.

It may have been something today or it may have been something from earlier. They had just had their exams, so it was not too surprising that a teenage boy might be acting oddly.

He was stressed and he had a lot on his mind.

How did you describe a situation like that? After seeing that scene, Kiyomasa blushed and could not look Fukushima in the eye as she answered.

“Katagiri-sama is feeling down...”

Huh? thought Fukushima with a tilt of her head.

Kiyomasa was blushing and had tightly closed her mouth. She seemed to have some tears in the corners of her eyes above the flushed cheeks. However...

...Katagiri-dono is feeling down?

What does that mean? wondered Fukushima.

Today, she and Kiyomasa had sort of won and sort of lost.

So it was them that should be feeling down, not Katagiri.

...So why Katagiri-dono?

However, one look at Kiyomasa told her the other girl would not be saying it again.

So Fukushima thought about it. Could she have misheard? Or had a foreigner like Kiyomasa misspoken?

But what had she meant to say? Fukushima tried to think of a similar phrase.

“I see.”

Given the location – the bath – Fukushima figured it out. And out of concern for Kiyomasa, she decided to continue while using the term the other girl had used.

“So when thou said Katagiri-dono was *feeling down*, you meant *feeling himself down below*?”

Eh? thought Kiyomasa.

Something seemed off about the way Fukushima said that.

But a Far Easterner like Fukushima would know the language better than her. So...

“Y-yes. Testament, Katagiri-sama was feeling down. While alone in the bath.”

“Alone in the bath!?” Fukushima raised her voice, but then gasped. “No, that might be most convenient for a boy.”

“Does being alone in the bath help when feeling down?”

“Indeed. Inside his room, he could receive an emergency call that forces him to stop before he is finished.”

That’s true, thought Kiyomasa.

“A rude call while feeling down alone in your room would be distracting...”

“Yes, and there would be little point in *feeling down* while distracted... Oh, not that I am the type to, um, feel down. I am only guessing.”

Kiyomasa laughed at what Fukushima said.

“You say that, Fukushima-sama, but aren’t you the type to feel down in secret?”

“In secret?”

“Testament. In secret.”

Fukushima gave her a shocked look.

“Well, um, isn’t it usually something done in secret?”

“Hm? Well, I suppose it is largely a mental thing.”

“True. There is, um, a largely mental aspect to it.”

“Testament,” agreed Kiyomasa.

Spiritual topics were her specialty, so she said more in order to cheer up Fukushima.

“Fukushima-sama, I know you can’t control when you feel down, but if it is ever too much to bear, I might be able to help.”

“Are thou...sure that would be the best solution...?”

“Yes, I would love to help out.”

“Thou would love to!?”

Then the door to the changing room opened and a skinny figure with six black wings stepped in.

“Huh? Kiyochan, Fuku-chan, I thought you were injured.”

It was Wakisaka, #5 of the Ten Spears.

Wakisaka saw Kiyomasa and Fukushima turn back to give her a shushing gesture.

...Oh?

She tilted her head in confusion, so Kiyomasa explained.

“Katagiri-sama is feeling down inside there.”

Eh? thought Wakisaka as she stopped removing her summer uniform.

“...Is that supposed to be a euphemism? Surely there’s a better way of putting that.”

“But I feel bad for Katagiri-sama.”

“Yeah, you don’t want to be seen doing that. Then again, it’s his own fault for doing it here.”

Wakisaka decided to handle this as calmly as possible.

Now it was Fukushima’s turn to tilt her head.

“Wakisaka-dono. ...Which way did thou mean that?”

...Which way!?

She had no idea what that meant. But it implied she had to choose between a number of options.

What choice was there to make about Katagiri’s biological reaction?

Oh, I get it, she realized.

“If you’re asking if we should allow this or not, I guess I’d go with not.”

Kiyomasa was flabbergasted.

Wakisaka and her sister Yoshiaki always seemed somewhat strict. She had known them for a long time, but that strictness tended to be directed toward each other. However...

“Wakisaka-sama. ...Isn’t it a little strict to not allow him to feel down?”

“Well, um, wouldn’t you normally kick someone out for doing that? It’s a definite red card.”

...She’s that strict...!?

Just as Kiyomasa thought that, a gold-winged figure entered after Wakisaka.

It was Yoshiaki. She loosened the collar of her uniform as she spoke.

“Fukushima, I’ve finished the arrangements for Ichinotani, so...huh? What are you three doing?”

“W-well.” Kiyomasa could not hide how shaken she was. “Katagiri-sama is feeling down inside, but Wakisaka-sama said he should be kicked out for it.”

A question mark formed in Yoshiaki’s mind.

...Something weird is happening again.

But she more or less understood. Most likely, Kiyomasa was correct about the current situation. Probably, anyway.

Katagiri was feeling down for once. She thought that was a good thing for them all.

But just like her, Wakisaka could be strict with others. Looking at it one way, feeling down on the battlefield could be dangerous.

This is so silly, she thought as she took Kiyomasa’s side.

“This sounds like a pain, so here’s a solution for Katagiri feeling down: How about someone give him some advice or help him out?”

I should have known Yoshiaki-sama would know what to do, thought Kiyomasa.

“Th-that’s right. Since Katagiri-sama is feeling down, he could probably use some advice.”

“Advice...!?”

Fukushima stared at her in shock.

“Thou want to give him advice!?”

“Yes, I do.”

“S-such as?”

Was that question really worth leaning forward for? But Yoshiaki nodded and answered it.

“Katagiri is a boy, so he’d probably love some advice from a girl.”

“True...”

“Testament.” Wakisaka nodded. “That’s kind of embarrassing, but that would probably be best for Kacky.”

But she then brought a hand to her chin and asked Yoshiaki a question.

“But what kind of advice?”

“Angie, if a boy is feeling down, wouldn’t he be worried about how to make a comeback?”

“...You mean how to stand back up again?”

“Wakisaka-dono! That is far too blunt...!”

“No,” said Kiyomasa. “We need to make sure he can stand up again and again.”

“...Kiyo-chan, what if Kacky dies?”

“Eh?”

Kiyomasa fell silent because she had not considered that. So...

“W-we can all help out to make sure that doesn’t happen...”

“Kiyo-dono...help out how?”

“Well, um...”

He probably wouldn't like it, but still, she thought as she gave her answer.

“We listen to what he has to say, give him some hands-on guidance, straighten him out, and help him grow big and strong,” she said. “We all need to share responsibility here.”

“I’m pretty sure Kacky would be the only one taking responsibility after that.”

“What are you talking about, Angie?” asked Yoshiaki. “We already have that kind of bond.”

“True. Only together do we form the one and only Ten Spears.”

“Thinking about it now, that catchphrase puts a lot of weight on our shoulders...” said Fukushima.

Then they heard a knock on the door to the bath.

“W-wait! Why are all of you here now!? Didn’t I tell you stop being so lax with the bath order!?”

It was Katagiri. Everyone exchanged a glance before answering.

“...If you’re ever having trouble, you can confide in us.”

“I haven’t told you anything yet and you’re already spreading weird rumors about me!” he shouted. “Anyway, I’ve figured out some things about Hexagone Française’s tactics, so meet me in the briefing room later!”

Chapter 50: Surveyors at the Entrance

第五十章

『入り口の測り手達』



どうしようかと
どうなるのかと
思う心は何か
配点 (期待)

What is it that makes your heart

Wonder what to do

Or what will happen?

Point Allocation (Expectation)

It was the morning of the study camp's second day.

While on the way to the Sanada ruins, everyone sat atop the rocky field in front of the ruins.

Oriotorai lightly clapped her hands in front of them all.

"Now, I'll explain the situation. This is the second day of the study camp. That makes it the middle day. We're scheduled to spend today and tomorrow exploring these ruins."

She opened and enlarged a simple map of the ruins. And...

"Look to the entrance."

The entrance was directly in front of them all.

It was a giant hole. And an artificial one at that. It was eighty meters tall, twice as wide, and tiled with white stone.

"It isn't as big as below Musashino's bridge, but that's a pretty massive passageway, isn't it? I've heard that's so dragons can use it. The ruins are still active, so the preservation divine protections are still in effect. One side sank down and a bunch of mud and other stuff got inside, so there's a dirt floor and the ceiling is lower in some areas." Oriotorai tapped the map of the ruins. "But there are two levels. Both levels have a large hall. The first level is exposed to the surface and its ceiling is open to the sky. The second level is underground. And deep inside..."

The underground corridor she pointed to did not have anything drawn at the other end.

"Based on what Principal Sakai said, you can find the location of Lord Nobuyasu's suicide and some kind of facility. Exploring that area will be the

highlight of the study camp. However...”

She raised her eyebrows in a smile as she tapped on the two halls. That placed a dragon icon on them.

“Wouldn’t you know it? There are Celestial Dragons here today.”

“You sound happy, sensei.”

“Believe me, defeating Celestial Dragons isn’t easy.”

“You’ve done it before...?”

They all pulled back in shock.

“That was a long time ago. ...And, well, the specifics are complicated, but you’ll have to go in there and defeat them. While we do have tomorrow as an extra day, you can’t hope to retreat and come back once you’ve recovered. Be careful.”

“Sensei, could I ask something?” asked Narumi. “Have we set things up so it won’t cause problems if we *do* defeat them?”

Oriotorai nodded.

“This was a request from the dragons and it counts as an independent action on their part. They belong to Sanada, but Sanada says the dragons are acting on their own to recreate the First Siege of Ueda. ...And the dragons’ actions will apparently help Sanada Shigenobu’s faction join Hashiba and provide some relief for the remaining Nobuyuki faction. The Terrestrial Dragon from last night was apparently part of all that. ...I don’t think Hashiba wants us to explore the depths of these ruins.”

They all fell silent at that.

The teacher looked to her students and said more.

“That means the world’s greatest opponent is concerned about your actions. ...Okay, how have you divided up the teams? Neshinbara?”

“Judge.”

Neshinbara stood up from the rock he was sitting on, pushed his glasses up,

and read from the sign frame by his hands.

“We will be dividing into three teams today. The field team will be going to the ruins and exploring, the standby team will wait here for them to return, and the camp guard team will guard our base camp.”

“That last one is just mean!!”

Neshinbara nodded at everyone’s critique. *You leave me no choice*, he thought.

“Then should I call them the holy land preservation team? There’s plenty to do there, including controlling the bamboo spear launcher. Anyway...I’ll start by announcing the field team.”

He breathed in and plainly read off the list.

“Aoi-kun, Ariadust-kun, both Honda-kuns, Crossunite-kun, Stuart-kun, Urquiaga-kun, Mitotsudaira-kun, Asama-kun, Aoi Sister-kun, Balfette-kun, Mukai-kun, Date-kun, and Tachibana Wife-kun. ...It’s a lot of people, but you’ll be up against two Celestial Dragons. Keep that in mind.”

Adele raised her hand.

“Why are you splitting up the Tachibana couple?”

“I will be having Tachibana Husband-kun guard the second camp that we will be setting up here. He would have some difficulty using his Kamenuki against a dragon, but Tachibana Wife-kun’s siege cannons are perfectly capable of battling dragons.”

“I see,” said Gin with a nod. She was wearing a red Far Eastern summer uniform. She may have seen it more as personal clothing than a uniform because it had armor added in places. It still left her cleavage exposed, either as a holdover from the Tres Españan uniform or because she found it less restrictive. She gave a light bow toward everyone before speaking.

“So you are placing people where they will be of most use. Judge, I understand. I will do Master Muneshige’s share of the dragon fighting as well.”

“That would be great. Next up is the standby team that will wait for the field team while making today’s dinner in the second camp here: Tachibana

Husband-kun, me, Bertoni-kun...”

Shirojiro raised his hand.

“We would like to communicate with our clients from the diplomatic ship positioned between here and the Musashi. ...Whatever the reason may be, we are here to defeat some dragons in Sanada territory. If we can make some money here, we will have more to spend on the Houjou battle.”

“Understood. Have them send down enough food for everyone.”

Ohh, I'm so cool, thought Neshinbara as he continued.

“Persona-kun, Furubushi-kun, Ohiroshiki-kun, Naito-kun, Naruze-kun, and Naomasa-kun.”

“I did break my Suzaku last night. Makes sense.”

“We have anti-dragon-class firepower, so are you keeping us here in case they need rescuing?” asked Naruze.

Neshinbara nodded.

“I had Crossunite-kun do some investigating yesterday and it turns out these ruins have a risk of collapsing.”

“Huh? Where are they supposed to collapse? There’s only a forest over there.”

“It looks that way, but no.”

Neshinbara pointed at the sign frame Oriotorai had enlarged.

That was the map of the ruins which did not show the other end of the innermost corridor. However...

“A powerful stealth barrier is in place over this land. There’s apparently a large canyon below it due to the ruins partially sinking, but you can’t see it from the sky or reach it on the surface. You can, however, get there if you go through the ruins. Meaning...”

Meaning...

“The location of Lord Nobuyasu’s suicide and the other stuff Principal Sakai mentioned are all inside that stealth barrier.”

Adele listened to the Secretary.

After thinking about the state of the ruins, she gave her opinion.

“Are you saying the ruins are falling into that hidden canyon and we need to escape before they fully collapse if we’re fighting there?”

“Judge. That’s right.”

“...But I’ll be in Raging Beast.”

The others did not hesitate to give her a look of pity. Even Suzu nodded in her direction.

“D-don’t...worry. Y-you’ll make it...somehow...!”

“Thanks, but I really don’t think I will...”

“I can carry you with my silver chains in an emergency, so don’t worry about it. I already know how to handle Raging Beast.”

This was apparently the “privilege” of the person used as a hammer the night before.

At any rate, the remaining people would be on the preservation team.

“Are Nenji-san, Itoken-san, Noriki-san, and Azuma-san on the preservation team?”

“Judge,” confirmed Noriki. “If all goes well, we’ll finish this tonight, but we still need them to reinforce the tents.”

To his side, Nenji, Itoken, and Azuma meekly nodded.

“To be honest, we could be purified away if there are traps or powerful barriers inside the ruins,” explained Nenji.

“Because our personalities and traits are different,” added Itoken.

“...That’s a lot like how I’m more easily harmed by silver products, right?” asked Mitotsudaira.

Once they pointed it out, it made sense.

It was easy to forget after being their classmates for so long, but the more

unique members of their group could really shine or be in great danger in places like this.

...That can't be easy...

Just as Adele thought that, two people approached: Sakai and Sanada Masayuki.

"Hi."

The Musashi group saw Sakai raise his right hand.

"I thought I would give you a quick greeting and some advice before you head out. Oh, but pretend you didn't see Masayuki-san with me. ...Because Sasuke and Saizou are acting independently and recreating the First Siege of Ueda on Hashiba's request."

"Thank you so much for being so thoughtful."

Masayuki bowed toward them from below a tree.

"I will leave this to all of you."

He did not raise his head afterwards. He instead lowered it further as if to drive the point home.

"They have reached the ends of their lifespans. Most of their fellow dragons have already died. And they find pride in battle, so please," he told them.

"Please let them end everything with one final battle..."

That was when Horizon spoke to herself.

"When is the right time for us to live and to die...?"

"Are you going to ask them, Horizon?" asked Toori. "Since they've lost their destiny?"

"Judge," she replied. "There is a lot I want to ask and see. I wish to receive the answer to the question I am facing, and..."

She bowed toward Masayuki as she continued.

"I wish to study the path leading to that answer."

“We might be on the deck, but I want to hold a Ten Spears morning meeting.”

Katagiri spoke on the deck of an ironclad ship travelling through a shortened area of forest.

He was facing aft where he saw Fukushima, Kiyomasa, Wakisaka, and Yoshiaki in summer uniforms.

Beyond them, he could see the Azuchi Castle forming the sixth ship.

He glanced toward the Azuchi Castle just once. He looked up at the giant ship that looked dark and hazy with the rising morning sun behind it.

“I have informed and received permission from Hashiba-sama and Takenaka-san.”

“Testament.”

They all lightly nodded.

“Okay,” began Yoshiaki. “We’re listening. So what is it?”

“Testament. I figured something out while using Hundred Crest Land Survey in the bath last night.”

What had he figured out? He opened a *lernen figur* and displayed two sound pattern graphs.

One had many tall waves and the other one had just one large spike. However...

“This one with more waves is from when the Reine des Garous was playing around attacking us from the distance the other night. That was when she threw trees and stuff at us. Out of it all, this part here is the sound when she threw a tree.”

“What about it?”

Wakisaka shook her black hair as she asked that and Yoshiaki replied with a sharp look in her eyes.

“What is that other sound pattern? The one with a single wave.”

“Look what happens when I place that into the other graph.”

Katagiri added that single wave to the attack *lernen figur*.

It fit perfectly onto the Reine des Garous’s sound.

They all saw the wave’s perfect fit, but Wakisaka tilted her head.

“If it’s the same sound, isn’t it only natural it fits?”

“Angie,” said Yoshiaki. She raised her eyebrows at Katagiri’s combined sound waves. “Can you make the exact same sound when you do something?”

“Eh?”

Wakisaka stomped her foot on the floor and then did it again.

“...Wasn’t that the same?”

“It was a lot alike, but we’re talking about the sound made by throwing a large tree. ...It would be very hard to make the same sound with anything. Of course, even your stomps would be fairly different if I uploaded it.”

Katagiri smiled and looked to the others.

None of them were speaking and they were all giving him somewhat sharp looks.

He responded by tightening his lips and nodded. Then he held up the *lernen figur* displaying the single-wave sound.

“This sound is the engine of an Hexagone Française heavy god of war.”

Kiyomasa took a deep breath.

.../ see.

Not even she knew what exactly she “saw”, but she realized now that she was prepared to find out that she had no idea what was going on. And...

“Then where is the Reine des Garous?”

“According to the Hexagone Française divine transmissions we’ve intercepted, she’s on the front line.”

“Could she be on the outskirts of Paris?” asked Yoshiaki.

Katagiri shook his head.

“There are a number of possibilities, but...”

“But?”

“Whatever the case, we have to win.” Katagiri spoke with the light of the rising sun shining on him from the right. “Takenaka-san seems to more or less understand, so she said we should just take it slow. But I told her I think we should hurry.”

“And?” asked Yoshiaki.

She was answered by a *lernen figur* that suddenly appeared.

It displayed Takenaka in her pajamas.

“Hurrying makes this a lot harder. I really can’t recommend rushing things from here on. ...I really think we should sit tight and do things right,” she said. “But now that we’ve reached this point, hurrying is certainly an option. I’ll adjust our speed so we reach Paris by evening, so you all get ready. ...There’s definitely going to be some intense fighting at Paris.”

Kiyomasa could not help but feel impressed as the girl smiled while the *lernen figur* vanished.

But Yoshiaki raised her eyebrows in a smile when she saw it.

“I’m glad she always points out where we’re pushing things too far. ...Now, Fukushima.”

“What is it?”

“I still have your Ichinotani, so come see how it’s doing later.”

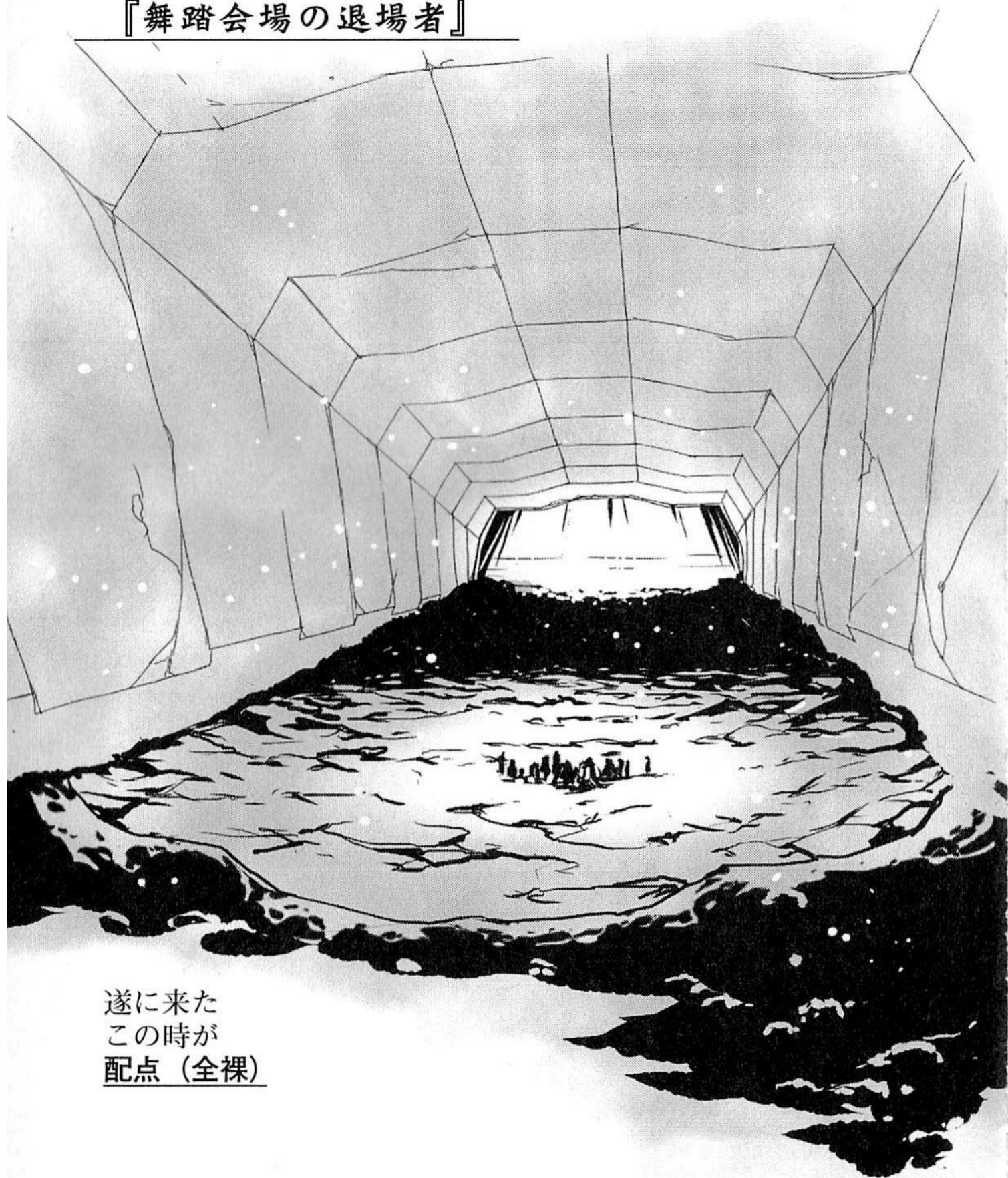
Yoshiaki tapped on Wakisaka’s shoulder and turned away from Katagiri and Kiyomasa. Then she lightly raised her right hand.

“Victory is mandatory in this Warring States period. That just means we have to fight a little more fiercely for the natural outcome. ...I just hope we have time to do some sightseeing in fashionable Paris.”

Chapter 51: Exiter from the Dance Stage

第五十一章

『舞踏会場の退場者』



遂に来た
この時が
配点（全裸）

The time

Has finally come

Point Allocation (Nudist)

“Now, then.”

A voice rang through the pathway.

The pathway was old and large. The walls and ceiling were made of hardened stone materials, but the floor was covered with packed-down mud.

The people walking through it looked miniscule. They formed a group of about twenty, but they would have had more than enough space to walk abreast and the ceiling was far above their heads.

The group produced mechanical noises as they moved and several sign frames surrounded the shrine maiden among them.

That was Asama. She was fully-equipped, including her binder skirts.

“Look at this...”

Her first words echoed from the ceiling and walls.

“It’s the same composition as Novgorod. But it’s a little older than that.”

“Are you sure it isn’t just in poorer shape?” asked Mitotsudaira.

Asama nodded and sent the data to all of their sign frames.

“It’s true Novgorod was being preserved and this place has definitely seen better days. I think the crust temporarily sank down on one side and the mud from the mountains poured in. But even accounting for that, I’m guessing this is about fifty years older than the one in Novgorod.”

Novice: “That connects to the history of the Age of Dawn, doesn’t it? The Far Eastern forces made a comeback by gradually working their way from the central land on out. These ruins were probably built on their way to Novgorod.”

“But isn’t this a lot bigger than that one?” Toori looked up at the ceiling as he walked alongside Horizon at the center of the group. “Hey, Bell-san? How far

until we reach the back?”

“Oh, judge. T-to reach...the back...we need to go through...the entrance... down this way.”

“Entrance?” asked Adele who was walking in Raging Beast with Suzu sitting on its head. “But I see the sky back there.”

“It’s...tilted.”

“That’s true,” confirmed Narumi who wore a Far Eastern summer uniform and a combat vest. “That must lead to the main hall. The mud forms a slope leading up to that, so we can see the blue sky through the hall’s broken ceiling.”

Unturning: “Can we get any help from the surface group?”

Novice: “We can help with your location. Based on the map Principal Sakai gave us, that is indeed the main hall up ahead. Then you head down to the second main hall. Behind that, you should find a minor hall. ...Principal Sakai was pointing us to that minor hall within the stealth space, but the two Celestial Dragons should be waiting in the main halls along the way.”

They’re so lucky, thought Neshinbara in the clearing by the mountain stream.

...I might be the surface staff officer, but it’s still disappointing.

He had really wanted to see a Celestial Dragon up close, but preserving the exit was an important job.

The exit was a large space located alongside a stream on the mountain slope.

“These ruins sure are big since they have to accommodate dragons.”

Unturning: “Novgorod was a frigid land. Most dragons have difficulty living there, so that one would have been made for humans. At the time this was built, I imagine accommodating dragons was common practice.”

Noriki responded to Narumi while he worked at reinforcing the tents back at their base.

Laborer: “In that case, I can see why most of those Whatever-They’reCalled Academies didn’t survive. ...The bigger you build something, the harder it is to

keep it from falling apart.”

Uqui: “It is also possible the dragon-fearing people destroyed these ruins to keep the dragons away.”

Those are some decent ideas, thought Neshinbara. I'll use them in my next novel.

Oriotorai spoke up while waiting for Ohiroshiki and Hassan to finish the curry.

“Good, good. The real fun of a study camp or class trip is to give some serious thought to the places you visit, so make sure you give it enough thought to write a report once we get back.”

Being a student sure keeps you busy, sighed Neshinbara before he asked a question.

Novice: “How are things down there?”

Scarred: "Oh, judge. ...Lady Futayo just took off running."

Novice: “Huh?”

Hold on, thought Neshinbara.

Novice: “While investigating her surroundings, I hope! What in the world is she doing!?”

He soon had his answer. And from Futayo herself.

Tonbokiri: “Chaaaaaaaaaaaaarrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrrge!!!!”

Saizou was bathing in the sunlight entering through the hall's open ceiling.

Even as a Celestial Dragon, his body functioned much the same as a biological creature's. The only major difference was in how they were born and how they died. *There really aren't any other real differences*, he thought.

Of course, that might have been a higher being overlooking the hardships of lower beings. However...

...I'm so sleepy.

The sunlight was the real problem. Summer sun was especially dangerous.

As a dragon, some parts of his body had a secondary circulatory system to supply them with blood and ether. When he warmed his body, the blood flow improved and those things naturally loosened up.

When they loosened up, his entire body would grow lethargic. And that made him sleepy.

Simply put, the summer sun made him sleepy.

...Sasuke is down below, but...oh, well.

I think I'll take a nap, he thought.

Just then, he heard a sound. It echoed through the ruins, so it was impossible to miss. The ruins were built to accommodate dragons and other large lifeforms. His hearing had been fading lately, but that made him all the more sensitive to out-of-place noises.

"Oh, fine then. I guess we're starting the First Siege of Ueda now."

Saizou hunkered down.

He positioned himself to protect the entrance leading underground and he looked forward. He directly faced the hall's entrance.

There was an upward slope on the other side of that entrance. It was left over after he dug through the mud piled-up and blocking the entrance. As for why had he not cleared out all of the mud...

...Sasuke takes everything so seriously...

The other dragon had insisted it remain in case pursuers or attackers showed up.

There had indeed been a time when they had been hunted like that.

...That was 800 and 400 years ago, wasn't it?

That was long ago when the dragons had been devastating Europe in the Harmonic Divine States. Their ancestors had started that during the great Germanic migration, so the dragons had begun to sweep across Europe about 1200 years before.

Their ancestors had inherited Germanic names and swept across Europe. But after the great migration, the humans had also inherited names of those who inherited the next generation and the two groups had fought over a span of centuries.

Saizou and his generation had joined the fight 800 years ago when both sides had reached a watershed decision.

Would a dragon or a human inherit the name of Charlemagne who would unite Europe? A conclusion had eventually been reached.

In the end, the humans had liberated central Europe. While most of the dragons had retreated or surrendered, Saizou and the others had occupied Sicily in southern Italy and resisted from there.

But 400 years ago, they had been defeated and forced to retreat.

However, they had heard something during those battles.

It related to 800 years ago. While the dragons had expanded the battle lines and conquered more territory, the ancient dragon king had been defeated behind their backs. And it had been done by a group of unknown humans and cooperative nonhumans.

It had been a Testament Cross-Borders Unit.

Those one-off groups were composed of people summoned to ensure the Testament descriptions were carried out or to resolve a threat to the world.

Who gathered them? Who were the ones gathered? No one knew. But Saizou and his group had refused to believe such a thing existed as they conquered the mild land of Sicily.

And 400 years ago, they had heard of a certain Testament entry.

It described a mass disappearance in a certain town in Saxony of northern M.H.R.R.

It said 130 boys and girls had gone missing and not one of them returned.

Sasuke had feared they would be blamed for those disappearances.

But that curious flying dragon had looked into it and discovered a certain fact.

Namely, nothing at all had happened in the specified town. And the humans had been so busy with the history recreation of the crusades that no one had particularly cared.

But that night, they had been attacked.

Their enemies had definitely been human, but those humans had used strange weapons and spells.

The dragons had halved the number of enemies, but over the course of a few hours, they had taken even more damage themselves. So before dawn, the nearly-devastated surrounding clans had decided to retreat.

Saizou and his group had done the same for their own reasons, but their pride had not let them flee into the European mountains. They had instead split up to the east and west.

It was 160 years ago that they had fled east and stopped in Far Eastern land during the Harmonic Unification War.

By that point, Sasuke and the rest were fed up with a combat-oriented life. It had helped that the Far Eastern people had worshiped the dragons like gods and treated them well.

But they had realized something after they began living here. Namely—
“Whoops.”

The enemy had arrived. At first, it was just one human running straight down the slope at the front entrance.

There were others behind her, but just the one warrior girl took the lead.

...Seriously? Is she dumb?

A downward slope pushed your balance downwards and made it hard to move to the side.

If he fired a dragon cannon here, she was toast.

So he did.

Futayo recognized the dragon's movements. She had seen this plenty of times

the night before. Yes...

...When dragons breathe their dragon cannon, they fire it after a count of three.

Vice President: “Hey, Futayo, we still haven’t reached the top of the slope. Are you okay!?”

Tonbokiri: “I am fine! I mastered dragon cannon timing last night. They fire after a count of three.”

It fired after a count of two.

Asama saw the dragon cannon launch out like a rod stretching forward.

The downward slope was torn through and destroyed. It hit almost directly to her left. That was the center of the slope.

...I’m glad I was in charge of protecting the right side of the pathway!

With that earnest thought, she checked on the damage. After all, a dragon cannon had scored a direct hit where Futayo was. There was only one possible result: “Kyaaaaaaah! She was fried...!!”

“You sure are enjoying this!!”

She had evidence to argue against their complaint: she saw something white in the broken center of the slope.

They were...

“...Bones?”

“Dragon bones,” clarified Narumi as she calmly walked up behind Asama. She lightly kicked the dirt slope with the sole of a prosthetic foot. “Even if the ruins had slanted, I thought it was strange that the mud had piled up into a hill like this. ...This must be a dragon graveyard. I don’t know if it’s nostalgia for ruins built in the Age of Dawn or if their ancestors came from here, but Terrestrial Dragons choose to die here.”

“But,” continued Gin while running down the right side of the slope. She faced forward and frowned while speeding up. “Why isn’t that girl dead? She dodged

it by running straight ahead with as much speed as she could muster.”

Up ahead of Gin, Futayo was running with her hair fluttering behind her. She would reach the center of the hall in no time like this.

“She’s alive...!” said Asama when she saw the girl.

“You’d really killed her off in your head, hadn’t you!?”

The others’ voices were answered by Futayo’s voice from up ahead.

“To battle!”

Saizou prepared himself as Musashi’s Vice Chancellor raised her voice and poured on even more speed.

...How is she going to do this!?

He saw her crouch down.

A moment later, she accelerated even more. She had used her spear’s extension device to launch herself toward him.

She closed the gap between them. However...

...Not yet!

She had not yet reached the 30m range of her spear’s cutting power. So...

...How about I take her out with a blow from beyond that range!?

He had yet to fully charge up a second dragon cannon.

So he just had to make a swift attack from outside the enemy’s range.

A dragon punch was more than enough to kill a human.

So that was what he did. He pulled his head back to adjust the distance between them, and...

“Hh...”

He inhaled in order to launch his right arm out.

Just then, he saw the enemy use her spear’s extension device to launch the spear tip toward him.

It was still too distant to cut, but there was something on top of the extended spear tip.

“Acceleration Spell: Racing Words. ...Tachibana Gin has arrived.”

Gin accelerated.

Her acceleration spell, Racing Words, accelerated in pursuit of a target object, just like Muneshige’s Kamenuki.

So she had pursued the Musashi Vice Chancellor and remained behind the girl’s back.

...And now I’m accelerating toward Tonbo Spare’s tip!

The two of them had not prepared this in advance.

Gin had simply chased after the girl, thinking she might be able to help out somehow, and she had found a chance to move out ahead.

So she had done so.

She could not intimately exchange support with this girl like she could with Muneshige. It was just that this girl’s only talent was in racing forward, which created far too many openings. So...

“There is something severely wrong when I have no choice but to lend a hand like this.”

Musashi’s Vice Chancellor had probably only launched Tonbo Spare’s tip forward as a feint. And she probably had not given much thought to what she would do afterwards.

That left Gin no choice but to move in ahead of her.

“Arcabuz Cruz...!?”

She fired that cannon. But in that very moment...

...Is he going to shoot...!?

Saizou rethought his counterattack and used a dragon cannon instead.

Futayo saw Gin riding atop her spear tip.

...When did she get there!?

Gin-dono is surprisingly nimble, she thought as she saw the dragon breathing out light.

That was a dragon cannon. It was a weaker blast since he had just fired one, but it was more than enough to take out Gin and Futayo.

Futayo could try to cancel it out with Tonbo Spare, but Gin was in the way on the spear tip.

If she activated Tonbo Spare now, Gin would be cut.

That would be bad, thought Futayo. *And I doubt Muneshige-dono would like it.*

But she calmed herself down and continued that thought.

...But I know Gin-dono can find a way out of this.

“Bind! Tonbo Spare!”

Gin had half-expected the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s decision, but at the same time...

...C-curse her!

That girl had actually done it.

Gin hurriedly reached a hand into the air. An Arcabuz Cruz was there. Firing it had been what prompted Saizou to use his dragon cannon. The recoil had caused it to lower, so she grabbed onto its back end with her prosthetic arm.

After floating up a bit, the recoil lowered her back down.

She was safe now and the enemy would be wide open after firing the dragon cannon, but then Gin saw a spear tip below her feet.

“———!?”

Tonbo Spare had used its extension device to shrink down.

There was no point in asking “What are you doing!?” or “Are you *trying* to kill

me!?” The Musashi Vice Chancellor had pulled it back to match the timing of the arriving dragon cannon.

“Curse her...!”

Saizou saw a scattering spray of light between him and his enemy.

It was ether light.

He had seen these bursts of light so many times in the past and they were as beautiful as ever today.

This meant the enemy had endured his dragon cannon, but it also meant he had defended against their attack.

It was just like the past. No, humanity was even more frightening than that.

Dragons had no means of strengthening themselves outside of growth and experience, but humanity could endlessly strengthen their weapons and spells.

This was the same. Even 400 years ago, negating his dragon cannon had been a difficult feat. But now...

“You can do it with a spare weapon!?”

The light faded and the enemy was there.

They were unharmed. That much he knew. However...

...I hit one of them!

Because Musashi’s Vice Chancellor had pulled back Tonbo Spare, Tachibana Gin would have been hit by the dragon cannon. Even a light hit would have been a full-body blow. So— “———!?”

Saizou twisted his body to the left when he felt something as clear as empty air on his right cheek.

A moment later, something pierced through the space his right eye had just vacated.

It was an artillery shell.

...Isn’t that the same thing that hit Torahide last night!?

Then the wind whipped up and Saizou saw something beyond the scattering light. The enemy he thought he had hit was just fine.

...This is both a strong point and weak point of humanity.

“You worry for your companions!”

Musashi’s Vice Chancellor was holding the artillery girl, Tachibana Gin, in her right arm.

And a new cannon had appeared over her shoulder. At that size, it had to be a siege-class cannon.

“Pierce him. ...Cuatro Cruz.”

Gin suppressed her emotions.

After all, she really should not have survived that.

She would have died if she had not made a ridiculous decision when the spear tip had arrived below her feet.

...I never thought I would be using Racing Words to pursue the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

She had not had time to adjust the homing direction. She had meant to accelerate backwards, but she ended up diving into the girl’s chest because the default setting chose the target’s center point.

The girl had caught her and light had exploded before her eyes.

“Honestly...”

She had fired toward their opponent’s right eye earlier.

Living creatures would react subconsciously to visual information. Dragons had once been wild animals and this one had noticed and responded to the attack on his eyeball even if he had not consciously understood what it was.

The dragon swung his face to the left, which was to the right from her perspective.

That was exactly what Gin had wanted.

Cuatro Cruz's shell flew toward the center of Saizou's face.

But Gin saw something.

"Fine, then."

With those words, the dragon's body blurred. Or so it seemed to Gin. And...

"Too bad."

The shell pierced through Saizou. But it had not hit or harmed him. The dragon had disappeared and the projectile had passed right through him.

"Take this."

But a moment later, the dragon reappeared and his left foreleg flew quickly toward her.

Gin knew it was going to hit them. The dragon was going to hit them with all his great strength.

But her decision of what to do was somewhat delayed by a question.

...What was that just now!?

Saizou had "hidden in the mist" just as his surname of Kirigakure implied.

The shell had passed through him and Gin heard the reverberating noise of it hitting the opposite wall.

She only let the surprise hold for an instant, but that was enough of a delay for the enemy's attack to hit them.

She could not let that happen.

So Gin decided she would at least allow Musashi's Vice Chancellor to escape safely.

She turned around to shove the other girl out of the way, but then she noticed something.

Musashi's Vice Chancellor's face was covered with a surprised but beaming smile.

"Gin-dono! Did you see what he did!? That was incredible!"

...Please don't grab and shake my shoulders...!!

While she was shaken back and forth, Gin realized they had completely lost any chance of escaping.

She decided to use Arcabuz Cruz to blow off the other girl's head while Gin herself was killed by the dragon's blow.

...This girl will be murdered and I will die honorably in battle. That is for the best.

“———!”

But then she saw a means of escape. And...

“Eh?”

It hit.

Saizou realized his full-power attack had swished through empty air.

...Are you serious!?

He had targeted someone in midair. It was a lot like catching a falling bird.

It should have been a sure thing. That was why he had gone all out.

But the enemy had just dodged his left foreleg.

They had performed a three-dimensional midair spin and passed over his left shoulder and left wing.

Something had struck the two of them.

And Tachibana Gin had caught the weapon with her prosthetic arm.

It had launched the two of them out of danger.

“...An arrow!?”

He looked over to see a shrine maiden standing by the hall's entrance.

“...Musashi's gunner shrine maiden!?”

Mitotsudaira honestly commented on Saizou's words.

“Wow, even the *dragons* know about you...”

“I-I fired that to save people! See? Using those rules, I’m Musashi’s rescue shrine maiden! How about that!?”

Asama pointed forward just in time for Gin and Futayo to crash into the opposite wall.

They heard some cries of pain and surprise and the two girls fell to the ground while tangled together.

Seeing that, everyone fell silent and motionless, except for Kimi who glared at Asama.

“What was that about rescuing people?”

“...I really don’t think I did anything wrong.”

“Then how do you explain this?”

“Well, it’s really that wall’s fault for being there. Don’t you think?”

But Mitotsudaira could not help but ask.

“Um, Tomo? ...Aren’t you not supposed to shoot people?”

“Eh? It’s okay if I’m rescuing people or training.”

She set up a breakwater of counterarguments at record speed. But it was something else that mattered here.

“Are you allowed to shoot dragons?”

“Umm, not if they’re students.”

“Are you if they aren’t students?”

“Yes. There are no rules saying I can’t.”

“That dragon isn’t a student.”

The shrine maiden immediately fired.

Saizou quickly took evasive action.

...*That was sudden!*

He could dodge this. The attack was quite fast, but that was not a problem when he had the strength and reactions of a dragon.

Assuming, that is, this was a straight-line attack.

It was not. The enemy's arrow drew a trail of light that showed its path was bent ever so slightly.

"...Homing!?"

He knew gunner divine protections could apply homing functionality, but if she could add that effect to such a high-speed shot...

"Talk about dangerous...!!"

Saizou raised his tail and moved.

He ran.

Instead of guarding the entrance leading underground, he charged at the enemy along an arc from the right.

He had a reason for doing so: the enemy's homing arrow. A high-speed homing shot was an absolutely ridiculous attack, but there was a way of avoiding it: his tail.

Homing divine protections worked in one of two ways: dynamic homing that learned the enemy's shape and pursued that, or reactive homing that pursued the enemy's ether or heat source.

A dragon's shape was hard to learn due to their tail, wings, and horns, so reactive homing was generally used against them.

That meant he had something to act as a decoy: his long tail.

By extending his tail, the tip would act as a decoy.

The pursuing arrow would be quite literally "tail"-ing him. Then he only had to swing his tail like a whip by the wall. Once the enemy projectile lost sight of its target, it would collide with the wall.

But to do that, he needed enough space to extend his tail.

He had to run. So...

...I'll plow right through them!

Saizou ran forward to settle this all at once

His tail was extending and the enemy's arrow turned a forceful corner to pursue.

He moved forward.

"Oh?"

Naito looked up as she gathered Schwarz Techno spells in her broom's Orei Metallo by the entrance of the ruins. She turned toward Naruze.

"Ga-chan, did you just feel a tremor? Like a deep 'thoom'."

"Eh?" Naruze looked up. She had been sitting sideways in a chair while drawing up illustrated spells on her Magie Figur, so she looked back to the drawing she held. "Maybe that would be a better sound effect for my artillery spell representation."

"No, no. That's not what I meant."

Naito looked to the wide entrance to the ruins. Muneshige stood in the center of the entrance with a hand on his chin and his gaze fixated on its depths.

"What's going on?" asked Naomasa.

Naito nodded.

"It sounded like something crashed into the wall."

Mitotsudaira saw Saizou collide with the wall as if scraping his right side against it.

He had lost his balance while running toward them.

...What was that?

It had happened just after he had gotten Asama's arrow to pursue his tail.

She knew what the dragon had been trying to do. He had been trying to use his tail as a decoy to dodge the homing projectile while he charged toward

them in an attack. He had combined his defense and his attack into a single fell action.

While running, he had raised his tail straight up but by the wall so that Asama's homing arrow would lose sight of him.

And in that very moment...

"Toori-kun, Horizon."

Asama had spoken very quietly.

"Want to...make some ice cream?"

An explosion had followed.

And this funnel-shaped explosion was directed toward the location of Saizou's tail.

It was Asama's arrow.

Tenzou recalled the past.

...This is because of our gym lesson in spring, isn't it!?

The day before the Battle of Mikawa, they had failed to accomplish anything in the deceptively simple task of pursuing Oriotorai on the way to Shinagawa.

Asama had used a homing divine protection but still failed to hit Oriotorai.

What was it Oriotorai had done then?

"She cut her hair and used it as chaff to defend against Asama-dono's arrow..."

"Yes." Asama nodded toward Saizou whose tail had been blasted upwards by the explosion. "I learned from that. If my arrow is ever thrown off course by bodily chaff, the arrow releases its full power in the previous direction of movement."

"I see," said everyone who had been a part of that lesson.

"That's Asama for you. She pulls out all the stops when it comes to slaughtering the enemy."

“I know, sis. The same trick won’t work twice against the Asama Shrine. ... That’s so cool!!”

“If you ask me,” said Urquiaga, “I want to know why our teacher has been teaching us how to fight dragons...”

“Not again!” protested Asama. “Why do you always attack me like this!?”

Nevertheless, she had been quite effective.

Blasting Saizou’s tail upwards had knocked him off balance as he ran, so he crashed into the wall on his right. However...

“Master Tenzou!”

“Judge! ...Be careful, everyone!!”

Tenzou thought, *The enemy made the right decision there.*

...If he had continued down the center of the hall after his tail was hit, he would not have run into the wall.

But when he lost his balance, he would have been exposed in the center.

“So he intentionally moved to the wall...”

And he crashed into it. That had produced a loud noise and powerful tremor.

But when the dragon slowly began moving again, the wall was revealed behind him.

“He barely left a mark on the wall...!”

There was enough destruction to account for an initial hit, but there was no mark from such a large mass colliding with and scraping along the wall.

That meant the enemy had only pretended to hit the wall so hard.

“Here he comes!”

Saizou smiled bitterly.

...Honestly.

To think he would pretend to run into a wall and take damage.

He would never have even considered such a tactic 400 years ago.

...But this is nice too.

After all, he was the former Kirigakure Saizou now. As a ninja, he had to disguise himself while he feared and endured the samurai who were like Far Eastern knights. This was a good way of doing that.

“Besides,” he said as he moved.

He slammed his right side into the wall, used the rebound to move left, and charged toward the enemy group.

“I remember now...!”

He had a single target.

“There’s a shrine maiden here...!”

The dragon’s charge drew a shallow arc as it targeted Asama.

“Eh!? Wh-why me!?”

“Did you forget you’re the one who blasted him just now!?”

“Th-that’s true, but he just said something about remembering something...”

They did not know what had happened to him in the past, but they all rushed to react in time.

Adele moved out first.

Silver chains held Raging Beast’s tail and threw it toward Saizou’s face like a hammer.

“Here we go, Adele!”

“Maybe a little warning next time, but let’s see who’s tougher!”

She crashed into him. Or she should have.

Instead, Raging Beast passed right through him.

The blue and white mobile shell and the silver chains holding it passed

through Saizou's face and out his back.

She did not hit.

Just like before, he briefly vanished and let the attack pass through him. But someone immediately reacted to this fact. Near the entrance leading underground, Gin kneeled with Cuatro Cruz at the ready.

"How about this!?"

She swept the weapon down to spray artillery fire from Saizou's head down to his hips.

She fired a total of eight shots at slightly different heights.

The dragon would collide with the others just as those were arriving.

...Did it work!?

Gin ignored the Musashi Vice Chancellor who was dizzy and sprawled out on the floor next to her.

Gin also felt a little dizzy after Asama's "rescue", but the battle was not going to wait around for them.

...This battle has some pretty harsh ups and downs.

With that thought, her eight shots definitely pierced Saizou.

This was not meant to defeat him.

It was meant to keep him from hitting her companions.

She did not at all understand how the dragon's defense worked, but it negated their attacks.

So if she kept firing on him in the instant he collided with the others...

"He shouldn't be able to hit them!"

With that, the dragon reached the others.

Asama saw the dragon's leg sweep toward them.

It hit, but she heard nothing and felt no wind or shaking.

...He vanished!?

It happened again. Saizou vanished.

And the wind passed between her and the others.

Or was it better to say it passed *through* them? The enemy's physical form had vanished and they were unharmed. Overhead, Gin's shells solidly hit the wall.

...What is this?

The charging dragon had "vanished". Most likely, that was to avoid Gin's shellfire.

That had saved them. However...

"Mitotsudaira! Asama!"

Just as Kimi yelled their names, three things happened.

First, Mitotsudaira slammed her silver chains horizontally to the right.

Second, Horizon grabbed Asama from behind and forced her to the ground.

"Toori-kun!?"

And third, the crossdresser ran out in front of her. There was a light tremor in his back.

...What!?

Asama did not understand, so she tried to escape Horizon's grasp and get back up. But Horizon...

"...These feel a lot nicer in the hands than I expected."

"Did Kimi infect you!? She did, didn't she!?"

But Asama saw the idiot look back as he stood protectively in front of them. The crossdresser faced her as she struggled to stand up.

He's okay, she thought. He isn't hurt. But...

"Is that all?"

With that announcement, the black dragon reappeared in the center of the hall. And in that moment...

“My king!”

Mitotsudaira called out to the crossdresser just as he was split.

His blonde wig was audibly sliced diagonally in half and the line of the cut extended down to his shoulder.

“Ohh.”

The diagonal red line on his shoulder reached his upper arm as well.

He was injured. But that was not all. The same thing happened to Horizon’s left arm as she held Asama from behind.

“Oh, dear.”

It split. No, it was torn. It was like stabbing a knife diagonally into a narrow fruit.

...Don’t tell me...

A lubricant warmed to body temperature flowed from her arm. As for his arm...

“...!”

Blood sprayed out.

Chapter 52: Storyteller in the Round Hall

第五十二章

『円形ホールの語り部』



それはかつてのこと
つながること
つながらないこと
何もかも
配点（竜と人）

Something that once was

Something that connects

Something that does not connect

Everything

Point Allocation (Dragons and Humans)

Kimi saw two movements.

The first was Mitotsudaira raising her eyebrows and moving in front of the foolish brother.

The second came from Asama who remained silent.

“...”

First, she quickly wrapped some healing charms around Horizon’s arm. After applying two or three, she tied them fairly tight.

Horizon gave Asama a calm look.

“...Thank you very much.”

“You’re the one that saved me.”

Asama’s eyebrows were somewhat raised and Kimi just about laughed when she saw it.

...Honestly.

Horizon was clearly intimidated by Asama. Now that Horizon had the emotion of anger, Asama’s emotion reached her far too directly.

But Horizon must have been confused by that anger when Asama was also thanking her.

We have an excellent friend, thought Kimi. Her thoughts deepened: I’m glad we have a friend who can demonstrate that contradictory combination of conscience and sacrifice that is in the gap between what one should do and what one must do.

“...Asama.”

“Yes?”

“I see you didn’t panic.”

“...I’ve grown.”

Asama must have felt that short response was not enough because she clarified.

“I’ve wiped away my previous ‘normal’ where I would be shaken to tears when something was harmed.”

“Really?” asked Kimi. “So you’re not going to put on an adorable show that makes him say, “Oh, I didn’t realize you had that vulnerable side. How cute!’ You don’t want to be as cute as me with my fear of ghosts!? The way I faint is super popular and oh so cute! Thud!”

“...Kimi, your eyes roll back in your head when you faint. Can you really call that cute?”

“You said it! You said it, didn’t you!? The whites of my eyes are cute! They’re clean! A freshly cleaned white!”

Meanwhile, Masazumi finally caught up from behind and she did not try to hide how out of breath she was.

“Um, what’s going-...whoa, whoa, there’s a dragon there! And Aoi, did you stop crossdressing-...no, you didn’t! You just took off your wig! And your arm is bleeding...? Wait, Horizon’s arm is bandaged too!”

“Do we really have to explain everything just because you arrived late?”

“Could you sum it all up for me?”

“We were just having a little fun is all.”

Asama looked to the foolish brother’s arm. The blood was flowing out and dripping down, but Asama sighed.

“...I’ll make sure it doesn’t leave a scar, so don’t work it too hard, okay?”

“Eh? I can’t work my arm too hard?”

“...I didn’t mean like that!”

When Asama said that, Kimi and everyone else fell silent.

After a while, a look of realization reached Asama’s face.

“A-and by ‘like that’ I mean day-to-day activities! Yes, ordinary day-to-day activities.”

Mal-Ga: “Wouldn’t that be a day-to-day activity for guys? Well, more like three times a day.”

Gold Mar: “There’s really no other way to explain how well your doujinshis sell, is there?”

Asama: “Not again! You’re trying to blame everything on me again, aren’t you!?”

Azuma: “Everything? What do you mean by everything?”

Uqui: “You don’t understand? You have ‘everything’ when you open up the memories submenu and can see all of the icons.”

Unturning: “It would seem some animals live in a different world from the rest of us...”

Regardless, Asama wrapped healing charms around the foolish brother’s arm.

His elbow dug into her chest while she did so, but she was too focused on healing to notice. And he simply stared at her hands working at his arm.

While activating the spells, Asama spoke quietly.

“Mito.”

“Judge, I know. ...I thought I had intercepted the enemy, but he made it through to my king.”

Horizon stood up and faced Mitotsudaira.

“Mitotsudaira-sama. I do not fully understand...but it is because you fought back that Toori-sama and I are alive.”

“It is true I managed to intercept the enemy. I believe I had a definite lock on him during that invisible charge. However...”

However...

“A knight is shamed if she allows her king to be harmed even slightly. Especially with Futayo over there. I bear full responsibility here.”

“Mitotsudaira.” Kimi spoke with an “I might as well” tone. “Asama was able to heal my foolish brother and Horizon because you positioned yourself in front of them. So this result was thanks to the cooperation between you and everyone else, myself included. So what are you going to do from now on? None of us is thinking about this silly responsibility game. And you should be thinking about it least of all. Do you know what I mean? If so, then raise your tail and charge at your prey! Go!”

“I tried silently listening, but that just kept getting worse and worse...!”

But Mitotsudaira faced away from her king.

“I understand. ...When I need to protect, I am a guarding knight. When I need to attack, I am a charging wolf. And right now I need to attack and finish off this enemy.”

She took a breath and brought out her silver chains. The four slack chains hung down from her arms.

“My king.”

“Eh? What is it?”

The knight answered the foolish brother.

“Feel free to order me to eliminate any burden I am causing you.”

Mitotsudaira took a breath.

She had sensed some kind of powerful presence during the dragon’s invisible charge. And it had felt like the presence moved away when she launched an attack in that direction. However...

...He has a slicing power.

Given that, her king and princess had been right to protect Asama.

Kimi and her king must have sensed a “gap”. Their entertainer’s instincts told

them an attack should have come their way but did not, so they decided it must be headed toward Asama instead.

Mitotsudaira guessed Horizon had acted on her king's instructions, so...

...This was another form of cooperation.

And that thought was accompanied by a voice reaching her ears.

"Nate."

"Judge."

"Can I ask for anything?"

"Judge!" she agreed.

Mal-Ga: "He'll be asking for her body, then..."

Gold Mar: "Yeah. She even said this was the time to attack."

Silver Wolf: "What are you people talking about!?"

"Then," said the idiot from behind her. "When you sleep with your head on my arm, could you move a little closer to me? When your head's near my elbow, it cuts off the circulation and my arm goes to sleep."

A stir ran through everyone except for Asama and Kimi.

Silver Wolf: "W-wait!!"

Almost Everyone: "Oh, we're waiting. ...Now, go ahead!"

Unturning: "Does that mean the Chancellor was hit in the arm because of that?"

Scarred: "Hee hee. Lady Mitotsudaira, aren't you glad you didn't sleep on his neck or stomach?"

Silver Wolf: "Mary!? I-I wouldn't do that! I wouldn't!"

Vice President: "But, Mitotsudaira, you were completely lying on top of Aoi and the others before."

Asama thought to herself as she watched Mitotsudaira prostrate herself before the idiot with her fingers perfectly aligned.

...Th-that was a close one! I need to make sure the damage doesn't spread to me!

After all, she had slept like that too.

Of course, that was only because armless Horizon had been between him and her and because she had been filling the space left vacant. But then Horizon spoke up without warning.

"Asama-sama."

"Wh-what is it...?"

"You too were sleeping on Toori-sama's elb-..."

"Ahhh! I'll fight! I'll fight! I'll head out there to fight alongside Mito!"

Asama felt a dull sweat soaking her body as she patted both of Horizon's shoulders.

She sent Mitotsudaira a sign frame containing what they knew about the enemy and what she could predict.

"Mito, Kimi, and I will kick that dragon's butt, so just leave it to us!"

...They will defeat that dragon?

Gin questioned Asama's words while Cuatro Cruz went through a rapid cooling process.

The dragon had just finished changing direction and took a light step to face them.

"Lady Asama, the Mito Lord, and the Chancellor's sister...are going to face him?"

Just then, the collapsed Musashi Vice Chancellor hopped to her feet.

She waved to the others.

"Listen up, everyone. Horizon-sama, I seem to be a poor match for this

dragon...so can I go on ahead?"

...What did she just say!?

But Musashi's princess responded to the idiot girl by looking their way and forming a large circle with her arms.

"Good," said the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

She then patted Gin's shoulder.

"Then let's get going, Gin-dono."

There was so much Gin wanted to say, but she swallowed it all.

She summed it up with a single word.

"Why!?"

Why would that thought ever occur to her?

Why was she so selfish?

Why did she choose Gin now?

But the girl responded without delay.

"You are the Peerless in the West's partner. There is no better battle partner for someone aiming to be the Peerless in the East."

Gin listened as the girl continued.

"Of course, if I had someone else by my side, I would gain a different advantage from fighting alongside them. ...But that is my reason for going with you here, Gin-dono."

"—————"

She is an idiot, thought Gin as she fell speechless. *This girl really is an idiot.*

Gin thought of her husband when she saw the samurai girl standing at ease in front of her.

...Master Muneshige.

She wouldn't notice if you beheaded her from behind or fed her poison.

And Gin understood something else beyond that. It was something only she understood.

...She could hold her own against you, Master Muneshige.

That girl thought of nothing but battle.

She was taking Gin to the battlefield because she thought that would give her an advantage in combat. She would never even dream of something other than combat happening.

She was completely obsessed with battle.

Meanwhile, Muneshige and Gin were jointly obsessed with being the Peerless in the West. So they looked to each other and had enough mental leeway to clear away every obstacle to that goal.

But this girl was alone.

However, that was only because she lacked someone like Gin in her life.

She was so obsessed with combat and the like that she did not have the mental leeway needed to look at anything else and she had no one to help her out.

So she had relied on Gin here.

“That is...that is a foolish decision. I am the Peerless in the West’s wife. ...Why would you rely on that?”

Gin turned to face the other way.

She faced the path leading underground and started forward.

“Rely on Tachibana Gin, not the Peerless in the West’s wife! The latter title is only available for Master Muneshige!”

Saizou turned around.

He was a little out of breath because he had not laid his hands on prey in a long while.

Hunting really was wonderful. His dragon heart was pounding with delight.

Two of the enemy had just gone to the lower floor. But that did not matter. He could see Musashi's Chancellor, princess, Vice President, and shrine maiden were still here.

As long as the information gatherers were still here, he still functioned as a barrier.

There was no reason to buy time, but he still watched his opponent's movements. They nodded at each other.

...Oh.

And they split up.

Three of them left their ranks: the shrine maiden, the Mito Lord, and what appeared to be a dancer.

Musashi's Chancellor and princess were being guarded by a ninja and a half-dragon back in the main group.

"I see." Saizou spoke to the three who had opted to appear before him. "A shrine maiden? So you really are haunting us."

Eh? thought Asama.

...With this and what he said before, what did shrine maidens do to him?

Then Toori called out to her from a short distance.

"I bet it was...y'know, that time in middle school when you shot down a dragon on New Year's."

"All I did was fire a warning shot because that flying dragon was making too much noise on the holiday. It's not my fault the arrow happened to hit."

"That was a hell of a surprise when it fell on the ship. The shrine visitors freaked out, but we managed to avoid any trouble by saying it was part of the festivities."

"Yeah, 'Okutama'-san got really mad and told us to take better care of animals. We let the dragon go soon afterwards and they've never gotten close to the Musashi since."

“Oh, that,” said Saizou. “That was probably a dragon from the neighboring tribe. They were pretty embarrassed, so I believe they decided not to fly over your ship afterwards.”

“Then I actually helped the Musashi stay safe in the air, didn’t I?”

“Why are you smiling?” asked Mitotsudaira, but Asama ignored her. *All’s well that ends well. Yes.*

But she had something to ask Saizou.

“What did shrine maidens do to you?”

“I suppose it wouldn’t be in the Shinto records. For us, it happened 800 years ago and then 400 years ago.”

Saizou breathed a glowing mist out from the corners of his mouth.

“They were Testament Cross-Borders Units.”

Saizou explained.

“800 years ago, the dragon king, who was something like a Chancellor for us, was slain by humans. It happened suddenly, but the absence of a king caused the dragon army to crumble. The Germanic unification and survival had been going well until then, but after his defeat, we scattered as disparate factions.”

This was such a nostalgic story. And...

“400 years ago, The Testament predicted an incident in which 130 boys and girls would vanish from a northern M.H.R.R. town in a single night. ...Fearing we would be blamed, we sent out a scout and discovered that no such incident occurred. However...”

Saizou was aware he was practically spitting out the words.

“On that night, we were attacked and our unit was destroyed.”

Mitotsudaira and the others looked to Asama.

Asama realized everyone was focused on her.

“I-it wasn’t me! It really wasn’t!”

Well, of coooourse it wasn’t, thought Mitotsudaira.

But someone else spoke up: Masazumi. She raised her right hand first.

“You’re talking about the history recreation of Hamelin, aren’t you? Yoshitsune mentioned that, too. She said it was similar to the Princess Disappearances.”

“Similar, hm? ...Interesting.”

True enough, thought Saizou as he laughed. The dragon’s intermittent breaths shook the hall.

And beyond that shaking, the dragon spoke.

“It is true that, 800 years ago, there was a battle in which an entire city vanished in a single night.”

“Wait,” said Mitotsudaira. “Do you know who the Princess is...?”

“No, I don’t.” The dragon laughed. “And making people disappear sounds more like a Loup-Garou thing than a dragon thing. ...Of course, we wouldn’t attack single individuals. But getting rid of an entire town or city’s population without destroying anything else? That’d be easy enough for us.”

“You...”

Mitotsudaira started to utter some kind of rebuke, but Asama cut her off.

“So we can view Celestial Dragons as...malevolent beings, can we?”

“Yes. That’s it right there. That presence.” Saizou bent back as he spoke. “The group that attacked us 400 years ago wore equipment we had never seen before. And a woman among them used the same term you just did. ...And I hear it was the same 800 years ago.”

The dragon raised the corners of his mouth. He showed off all of his fangs.

“It was a group of 130 from some unknown land. But you know what? After the Harmonic Unification War, when we first descended to the Far East...we found people using the exact same equipment.”

“—————”

“Do you understand now?” asked Saizou. “That force should not have existed in the Harmonic World. I have to wonder if most of what you call Testament Cross-Borders Units were units sent in from the Far East.”

Masazumi quickly sent a divine transmission.

Vice President: “Neshinbara, can you check-...”

Novice: “It’s no use. The Far East is a mountainous land, so mysterious disappearances, even for entire villages, were fairly commonplace. And 400 years ago, during the age of Hamelin, the Far East was ruled by the Kamakura Houjou clan. Do you know who their leader was at the time?”

Four Eyes: “Houjou Tokiyori. There, all done.”

Novice: “Wh-why must you be like this!? You’re only fanning the flames of darkness within me!”

His darkness did not matter.

But Masazumi had to ask further.

Vice President: “Do we know what this Houjou Tokiyori person did?”

Novice: “Judge. He was a wise ruler. And there is a certain story about him. It says...”

It says...

Novice: “He traveled all across the Far East and listened to the people there. Traveling to every part of the Far East was probably a first for a head of state.”

Wait, thought Masazumi.

And she looked to Saizou who looked back at her.

“Well?” asked the dragon. “The dragon clans who were still putting up a resistance at the time were destroyed, fled deep into Europe, and scattered to the east and west. But the people of the Harmonic World were busy preparing for the recreation of the crusades, so do you really think they could have dealt with us? In fact, it was our presence that was keeping the Europeans from recreating the crusades. They were afraid we would attack them from behind or

steal the land they left unguarded. ...We even considered doing just that to regroup our forces.”

“Then how were you destroyed?”

“Didn’t I tell you? Hamelin. ...Each time a similar incident was recorded in the Testament, some of our own would be wiped out somewhere. The few survivors bowed down to the Testament Union, converted to Tsirhc, and went to the Dark Continent. That helped with the recreation of converting the natives.”

Saizou laughed without smiling.

“There were also a lot of giants in the group that attacked us. When we looked into it, it seems those were probably remnants of the Taira clan or heroes that the Kamakura Shogunate didn’t know what to do with. And at the time, the leader of the long-lived pursued them into the Harmonic World.”

Masazumi knew who that had to be.

“Yoshitsune!?”

Indeed, thought Sasuke in the lower hall as he listened to the exchange from upstairs.

Whether they were real or fake, Testament Cross-Borders Units had existed in each era.

They had not appeared since the Harmonic Unification War, but Sasuke had a guess as to why.

...Most likely, they were a mixed unit with warriors from both the Harmonic Divine States and the real Divine States. Either that, or one or the other unit would send in the other.

That was why they left almost no trace and why they had not appeared since the Harmonic Unification War.

Sasuke thought about the spirited long-lived girl he had met four hundred years ago when he had lost so many friends in Europe and fled to the east.

She had been searching for an enemy she had once fought.

“Do you wish to finish them off?”

She had shaken her head at that.

“It’s already over.”

So...

“I want to ask them to join me.”

But they had failed to determine if that person belonged to the group that had attacked them.

After all, they did not know where that group had gone.

They still did not know.

Most likely, the Testament Cross-Borders Unit that had fought with them had been remnants of the Taira clan and excess warriors from the Kamakura Shogunate.

Houjou Tokiyori had secretly gathered those people who had nowhere to go and dispatched them to the Harmonic World during his travels around the Far East.

So they had probably scattered after the battle.

Instead of returning to their original home, they would have spread out across the Harmonic World to find a new place for themselves.

By defeating those malevolent beings, they had wiped clean their pasts and their place in the world.

...That’s a purification.

But what about the ones before and after that?

He did not know.

Both before and after that, those groups known as Testament Cross-Borders Units had had a certain objective.

Would Sasuke be able to get that across to these people?

...If possible...

I hope my opponents here are up to the task, he thought.

“Welcome.”

He stood up and crouched down on all fours.

Two girls stood at the hall’s entrance.

The one in blue wielded a spear and the one in red was followed by a cannon.

...Yes.

He had fought people like this long ago.

So he opened his mouth. He bared his fangs and viewed his enemy.

“Push yourselves to the very limit, humans. You stand before one of the Celestial Dragons who are the rulers of all other dragons. ...To ensure you are not conceited enough to think you can save the world when you cannot even defeat a Celestial Dragon...”

Yes.

“Push yourselves to the limit and prove it is not mere conceit, humans.”

Narumi felt a rumbling from the floor below.

And it was not a slow shaking. It was a powerful, vertical tremor.

...*Is that...?*

Dragons lived in Oushuu, so Narumi recognized this.

“That’s the sign of a large dragon fighting quite fiercely.”

“That means Sasuke’s taking this seriously,” said Saizou. “And just so you know, I’ve sparred with him many times, but not once have I won.”

Musashi’s princess raised her right hand.

“Are you bragging about how weak you are?”

How ill-advised, thought Narumi, but the Chancellor shook his head next to her.

“Hey, Black Mal.”

Mal-Ga: “I know. ...Even when they’re both the same sex, people like to compare themselves to the person they have feelings for.”

“I see.” Musashi’s princess nodded and then faced Saizou again. “So you love him.”

Mitotsudaira saw Saizou attack to the side instead of at her.

“What are you doing!?”

Her natural ability to provoke people is off the chart.

Everyone screamed and ran away, but Mary remained out in front. She instructed a few air spirits to supply a single overall current to the air.

The group’s speed increased. Meanwhile, someone was targeting the dragon who had his back turned toward Mitotsudaira’s group.

“Hit!!”

Asama fired a thick arrow.

...They don’t leave any openings, do they!?

Instead of reacting to the sound of the blast, Saizou took action when he sensed the presence behind him.

They were a troublesome bunch.

The group did not move as a single individual. Many individuals moved as a group.

Their skill at adlibbing was so great that trying to crush the threat before your eyes would only get you attacked from somewhere else.

The most annoying part was how well they cooperated.

When the shrine maiden fired on him, no one else made a similar attack.

They had been trained to not waste any of their attacks.

But, thought Saizou.

“If I know you’re cooperating, I can use that to my advantage...!”

He quickly crouched down and moved his entire body back.

He was confident that the shrine maiden’s arrow was not a homing arrow.

After all, if a homing arrow detonated like the last one had or if he dodged it, the fleeing group would be hit.

His guess proved accurate.

A rapid gust of wind raced by just above his lowered back.

There was no point in looking up to see the arrow fly out of the hall and into the sky.

Instead, he turned toward the shrine maiden’s group.

He did not use his legs to turn.

He used his tail.

By swinging his long tail into the underground entrance, he propelled himself around the other way.

He smashed the dirt-covered floor and the Terrestrial Dragon bones buried within. His four legs drew arcs along the floor.

He was directly facing the shrine maiden now. She was in her follow-through motion after loosing her arrow. He knew she would not receive a firing divine protection from her god if she did not properly follow that form.

But he realized something.

...The Loup-Garou is gone...!

In that instant, Saizou’s instincts pulled his body back. He ducked his head down and pulled his shoulders back.

Just then, a piercing power dropped right in front of his eyes.

It was the silver wolf.

This could not have come out of nowhere. She must have sent out her chain along with the shrine maiden’s arrow.

The hall’s ceiling had collapsed, but some of it remained. Her chain had

grabbed onto that and rapidly pulled her up above his head.

Instead of just dropping down, she had launched herself down using the chain and she held something like a spear.

It was the thick arrow the shrine maiden had fired.

At 1.2 meters, it was plenty long for a weapon wielded in the hands.

The most frightening part was how the arrow had been aimed at his eye. However...

“I have you now...!”

It was too late to aim a dragon cannon toward the falling enemy. And firing downwards would not sweep away the shrine maiden and dancer.

So Saizou moved. He got up and sent his left foreleg forward to strike the silver wolf. And...

“———!”

Masazumi saw it happen while she hurried along the right side of the hall to reach the passageway in the back.

Saizou was to their left. His giant body had just performed a back dash.

...Eh?

It was a light action.

She could not believe that a body so large could move so quickly. But she had also not expected him to move backwards. It reminded her of the previous night's battle.

That Terrestrial Dragon had been filled with hostility and had simply tried to crush them.

...I thought dragons always moved forward and focused entirely on attack.

This Celestial Dragon was different. When he sensed danger, he would evade, even if that meant falling back. And as a result...

“Kh...!”

As Mitotsudaira fell, an explosive pressure flew from her arms and toward Saizou.

That was the destructive power of Asama's arrow.

When it lost its homing lock on them, it would detonate to hit them that way.

Mitotsudaira had wielded that blast as a weapon.

She had pursued Asama's arrow and sent out a chain. She had first used the arrow as a piercing weapon. In the best case, that would work. But if it did not, the enemy would think he had dodged the piercing weapon just before it blew up in his face.

That had probably been Mitotsudaira's plan.

But the enemy had dodged it.

This was not just a raging dragon. It was a Celestial Dragon who would do what it took to defeat the enemy.

He was not a mere beast.

And his next actions proved it.

He hunkered down, opened his maw, and directed it toward Mitotsudaira, Asama, and Kimi.

"You know those two who went on down? One of them said she was a poor match for me. ...But you know what?"

Saizou laughed.

"She'll be an even poorer match for Sasuke. ...She's probably learning that the hard way right about now!"

With that, two tremors shook the ruins.

The first was a scream of air produced by Saizou's dragon cannon.

And the second...


...Futayo!

The shaking of battle arrived from the floor below.

Chapter 53: Dancer on the Round Stage

第五十三章

『円場の踊り手』



それは手を取り合うようできて
人の枷のようでもあり
しかし大切なもの
配点 (確信)

It is a lot like taking each other's hand

A lot like a bond

But very important

Point Allocation (Certainty)

Gin endured the attack by using her arms as a large shield.

This was the Celestial Dragon's counterattack. They had launched a cutting and artillery attack during their initial charge, but the dragon had responded with a high-speed tackle.

She of course had her arms set to full anti-shock mode. Similarly, the anti-impact divine protection was fully active. Once her body was lifted from the ground, she fired on him with Arcabuz Cruz and used the recoil to move back.

...But he still hit me with this much force!?

She slammed back-first into the wall.

She did not curl up her back. If she failed to endure the impact, her spine could shift out of place or even break. She distributed the impact across the entire surface of her back and even slammed her arms against the wall to let all the remaining force escape into the wall. However...

"Kh..."

Her shoulder joints screamed in pain.

Because her arms were prosthetic, the shoulder joints stuck out farther than the flesh in the front and back.

When hitting something back-first, those parts would hit first and the joint would shift or come off altogether. So she had tried to ensure it all hit at the same time. But...

...The harder material makes this much of a difference!?

The solid parts sent a powerful vibration into her bones. She normally could not feel it, but when the joints hit the stone wall at such great speed, it was like taking a hammer blow to each shoulder.

When the tingling pain spread across her entire body, even a great warrior like her felt on the verge of vomiting.

From the very first move, I'm completely at his mercy, she thought.

"Kah..."

She finally managed to get a breath out and she fell down the stone wall.

It was a two meter drop. That height was nothing for someone who had jumped around the Musashi for training, but her knees wobbled and...

"———"

They held. She was the Peerless in the West's wife. She was dripping with sweat and the focus of her eyes wandered, but she managed to speak.

What she had needed to protect was in her arms.

"Musashi Vice Chancellor. ...We endured the enemy's attack."

"Well done, Gin-dono."

With that, Futayo took a step away from Gin's arms.

Gin responded with her eyebrows raised.

"I was only repaying you for catching me earlier. In other words..."

She stepped forward.

Futayo tried to support her, but Gin ignored it as she walked ahead.

She would not rest her back on the wall. She simply continued forward and more light returned to her eyes with each step.

"Now we are even, Musashi Vice Chancellor. I will not save you the next time. ...You need to figure out why the enemy is unharmed even after a hit from your cutting power."

Splendid, thought Futayo. *So this is a name inheritor.*

...No, this is Tachibana Gin...!

Up ahead, the white dragon named Sasuke slid his body along while he

crouched low and aimed his right foreleg toward them. Since he swung his tail to keep his balance, he would be charging along an arc instead of a straight line.

This would be difficult to intercept. And...

“Here he comes! Gin-dono!”

Gin saw an explosion.

It was a white burst of speed and a white collision. At that size, the word “tackle” was no longer appropriate.

It was an explosion of power plowing toward them.

Realizing this would be impossible to stop, Gin focused on evasion instead.

She summoned an Arcabuz Cruz and used its blast as a thruster to leap right.

She moved away from Futayo. Just as she thought she had put a decent distance between them, a gust of wind passed by to her left.

Even Gin’s eyes could only see it as a white wind and it was accompanied by a seemingly solid surge of air.

But the dragon used more than just speed and wind.

...This is the identity of the previous attack!

Gin made a prediction about the seemingly invisible attack that had slammed them into the wall.

She had been hit by this once before. But instead of fearing it, she worked to understand it.

So she responded based on her prediction.

She spun around a bit and used Arcabuz Cruz to jump down and to the right.

As her knees slid across the dirt floor, something scraped along her cheek. And...

“...!!”

A horizontal blast of wind struck her entire body.

She was hit, but it was not a direct hit. That was...

...His tail!?

She clearly saw it for just a moment. Something like a giant white whip had straightened out as it raced forward.

That swinging movement could easily overtake the white dragon's charge.

But Gin knew why he did it. If his tail was extended behind him, it would act as a weight and hinder his speed when he accelerated forward.

So he swung his tail forward. And he charged forward at the same time. He initially accelerated using his great strength, and once that lifted him from the ground...

...The forward momentum of his tail gives him a second burst of acceleration...!

That was why she had so much difficulty reading his movements.

There was no point in reading his movements when he could reaccelerate that giant body in midair while already moving so quickly. The two girls felt like they were moving quickly, but from his perspective...

"He's just using a ridiculous amount of speed to guarantee he can crush us...!"

Gin raised her voice and was blown away by the wind, but she also took action.

She used her Arcabuz Cruz as a thruster to slide along the ground while...

"Cuatro Cruz!"

She fired thrice toward the white dragon as he passed by.

Gin used the shells as a foundation to view the white dragon's path.

How would the enemy respond to shells from Cuatro Cruz which was designed as a siege weapon?

...Will he dodge...!?

He did not.

The white dragon kept his back turned to the high-speed shells and took a zigzagging saw blade of a path.

He was not just moving out of their way. He made a game of passing between them and letting them fly past.

“———!”

Gin sensed the enemy's next action.

The white dragon swung his tail to accelerate, but this was not just to move forward.

After ducking to let the shells pass him by, he made an immediate leap to the left and right to move back in front of them.

...That's insane...!

But that was how this dragon attacked. He used the physical strength of a Celestial Dragon to perform a massive charge with overwhelming speed. And not only was his accuracy incredible, but he could take evasive action even in the middle of an attack.

He was a monster.

Wind exploded and the entire hall shook as the white dragon tore into the ground to spin around.

He used the turning motion to bite through the first of the three shells he had just passed and he swung his head to avoid the remaining two.

By that point, he was facing Gin.

Just as Gin realized another charge was imminent, she heard a voice in the wind.

“Bind...Tonbo Spare!!”

On the other side of the dragon from Gin, Futayo raced through the wind and ran below the dragon.

...How did my cutting attack work!?

This was the second time.

The first time had not worked.

She had tried to attack head-on as he charged, but he had adjusted for it.

And during the following charge, she had avoided his body, but his tail had come for her instead. If Gin had not covered for her, she might have been killed instantly. So for her next try...

“How about an attack on the thinner belly armor!?”

With that, ether spray burst out.

This was not a cut. The cut had been negated and its power had reverted to ether and burst.

...So that's it!

Futayo understood now. This enemy naturally possessed one method of defending against Tonbokiri and other weapons that reflected one's name.

“Does his white armor reflect me!?”

But what happened next overturned those words.

As Futayo looked to Tonbo Spare's blade, it appeared to be wrapped in light.

Except it was not.

It was not the blade that was shining. All of Sasuke's white armor was emitting light.

Futayo recognized that light.

“A dragon cannon!?”

It can't be, she thought. Aren't dragon cannons fired from the mouth or thrusters?

But the answer was simple.

“Indeed,” said Sasuke as he prepared to attack. “I am a white dragon. A dragon of light. ...My entire body can launch a dragon cannon.”

After a beat, light exploded from his entire body.

The underground hall of the ruins rumbled with light.

In the upper hall, Mitotsudaira received a direct hit from a dragon cannon.

...Kh...!

Even with Loup-Garou blood in her veins, she was helpless in midair.
However...

...I have to do something!

Several dozen defense barriers opened courtesy of Asama and they were all shattered in the span of a single breath.

Two silver chains were extended toward Asama and Kimi and she used them to pull herself toward the two girls. But...

“...!”

The dragon’s light had been weakened by the defense barriers, but it was still on its way. And it was still large enough to harm the two behind her as well.

It was going to hit. However...

“Silver chain!”

Mitotsudaira swung her arm and sent an attack down toward the approaching power.

It was the piece of the ceiling she had wrapped a chain around when leaping above Saizou. She forcefully broke it off and slammed it down toward the dragon cannon.

“...How about that!?”

This would not be enough to stop it, but the dragon cannon lost further power and scattered somewhat as it shattered the solid mass.

The dragon cannon still had power left, but at this point...

“Kimi!”

She looked back to see Kimi there.

Kimi had already started up Turning Point, the base foundation of her acoustic

spells.

“Dance at that stirring party of the past.”

It played a song. Kimi sang and danced along.

“I will reach this place no matter what it takes.”

More and more sign frames opened between the dragon cannon and the girls. This was Kimi’s Summit Dance defense.

“One day, the starry flowers will bloom beyond the sunset.”

It reached Mitotsudaira and collided with the dragon cannon.

Light burst and scattered like water.

As Mitotsudaira watched, the sign frames displaying the Summit Dance flowers shattered, but the dragon cannon was also split.

The raw power did not reach her.

It had been blocked.

Mitotsudaira spun around and landed. And behind her...

“The shooting stars tell tales of the dark night.”

White lines flew out in time with Kimi’s song.

Those were the paths of the two shots Asama had fired.

Saizou gasped.

...That was fast...!

This was nothing like his former combat experience. In the past, it had taken a bit longer to fire an attack powerful enough to affect a dragon.

But the times had changed. Shinto could be seen as the Far East’s history, but if even they had polished their combat techniques...

...They probably grew stronger in their battles with us!

There were no records of the Testament Cross-Border Units’ activities.

Because they were not a part of history.

But that experience had remained in a different form. That is...

“The evolution of humanity’s resistance!”

Saizou saw the path of the arrows and took action. He used his power as a dragon.

Saizou vanished from Mitotsudaira’s vision.

“————”

She could only see Asama’s arrows as they passed through the broken ceiling and disappeared into the forest and sky.

Then the 2nd Special Duty Officer raised his voice.

“Narumi!”

He and the Date Vice Chancellor immediately took action.

The 2nd Special Duty Officer protected everyone with a barrier of ether light formed from a thruster explosion. And the Date Vice Chancellor...

“Now this is dangerous.”

She rapidly pulled blades out of empty air and stacked them up horizontally to build a massive sword shield.

Some light appeared without warning.

The Date Vice Chancellor’s blades were shattered with a diagonal cut. As for the 2nd Special Duty Officer’s thruster explosion...

“...Nh!?”

He suddenly closed his spread arms and there was a slash running through his arm armor.

The half-dragon’s armor had been split with a creaking sound.

...Just how strong is that cutting power!?

As Mitotsudaira wondered that, the 2nd Special Duty Officer took a step back

and the Date Vice Chancellor did the same.

“There, maybe?”

With an instantaneous snap, she grabbed a surviving mandible sword from the air and then threw it.

It flew, and...

“Ohh, that was close.”

Saizou appeared there in the center of the hall.

He had just leaned back to dodge the mandible sword.

Just then, Mitotsudaira noticed the Date Vice Chancellor giving her an instantaneous glance.

It only lasted a moment, but Mitotsudaira sensed meaning in her eyes. Namely...

Uqui: “Oh, so you want to eat some natto.”

Unturning: “The scary part is that you’re not exactly wrong.”

Silver Wolf: “I have no idea what that means.”

But there was no time. Saizou had already retaken his combat stance and he was leaning toward Mitotsudaira once more.

He was going to charge. And the Date Vice Chancellor chose that moment to speak.

Unturning: “This is the same as the night before last.”

Eh? thought Mitotsudaira. Behind her, Asama had yet to nock her next arrow. Saizou was learning, so he would make this charge in the gap between Asama’s arrows.

He swayed his body toward them.

“Here I go.”

And he vanished just as he started running.

He became invisible once more.

Saizou viewed the enemy while erasing his visual form.

The shrine maiden was not yet ready for her next attack. That meant his enemy was not prepared to counterattack.

But there was still something they could use: an arrow.

The shrine maiden's arrows could be used as direct spears instead of bow-fired projectiles.

Of course, it would be difficult to rival the power of a bow-fired arrow with human strength or even Loup-Garou strength. So they would not attempt a penetrative attack.

...It will be a scattering attack!

Of course it will, thought Saizou.

It was an obvious tactic depending on how the enemy viewed his invisibility technique.

He might not be visible, but his giant dragon body remained. Even if he silenced his footsteps with a stealth spell, he was still there.

So they would use a scattering attack to hit an entire surface And a purifying power would be able to destroy his stealth. That was the basic strategy.

So as she danced, the dancer held an arrow between the fingers of her right hand. It had to be heavy, but she swung it around like it was a light bag.

"Vanish into the sunset."

She aimed for his chest.

"The bountiful summit."

And she threw it.

In that instant, Saizou moved with his visible form entirely erased.

Mitotsudaira sensed the enemy's presence.

She had some information from Asama and she had him more or less located,

but she was not entirely confident.

After all, this enemy was massive and powerful. A single mistake could get them all annihilated.

So she looked to two people for further proof of what she was sensing.

The first was Suzu. That girl had been facing straight forward this entire time.

She looked very nervous.

And the other...

...My king.

Their eyes met. She thought it might have been a coincidence, but then the princess next to him also looked her in the eye.

Once she noticed, the other girl nodded and pointed her right thumb downwards.

Mitotsudaira found it a little worrying that she could almost hear the princess's voice saying "go get him" in her mind. Nevertheless, she took action.

She had the confidence she needed to win this.

And a moment later, the scattering arrow exploded in the air.

A roar rang out.

Narumi saw the black dragon appear in the space ahead of them.

He had been hit by the scattering power of the arrow.

But it was not a direct hit. It had only grazed him lightly on the front left shoulder. However...

...It hit!?

Narumi questioned that. But Saizou shook his head as dark armor scattered from his shoulder.

"That was a close one...!"

What does this mean? wondered Narumi with a frown.

Based on her understanding of the situation, this should not have happened.

...That shouldn't have hit!

Narumi questioned herself about this.

But Saizou crouched low as if to push aside her confusion.

And he started forward.

Just then, the Asama Shrine Representative fired her next shot with perfect timing.

This third one was a penetrating arrow.

The flash of light was launched with a great roar, but...

“—————!”

Saizou vanished again. He swung his body forward and used his charging motion to disappear into thin air.

Everything about his motion seemed to fit together, so as Narumi watched it play out...

...This is dangerous.

She drew eight mandible swords at once and prepared to intervene.

She leaned forward and warmed up her prosthetic legs.

“Wait, Narumi.”

The half-dragon to her left interrupted. He pointed at the floor.

“You were correct. ...And someone convinced of the same thing is asking for assistance.”

Sure enough, Narumi saw something in front of where the dragon had disappeared and the arrow vanished into the sky. Something was moving toward them along the floor.

...A silver chain!

His voice seemed to reach her from overhead.

“Assisting a lost wolf might make for a decent change of pace. Amen.”

Undetectable Saizou charged toward the enemy.

He raced forward in a pose much like a human with their hands on the ground and their knees pulled up to their chest.

He aimed straight ahead at the throats of the girls whose gazes were racing through the air diagonally up from them in search of the vanished dragon.

First the wolf, then the dancer, and lastly the shrine maiden.

They had done it.

Yes, they had done it.

It had happened 800 years ago and 400 years ago.

800 years ago, their king and his aides had been slaughtered in a single night.

He had heard that the human-side forces had been led by a group that included a shrine maiden wielding a bow decorated with cherry blossom flowers, a dancer, and a nonhuman knight.

At the time, he had found it hard to believe such an uncertain and common-sounding group could have defeated their king. And he had felt the dragons' defeat was inevitable if their king could be defeated by a group like that.

So he, Sasuke, and the others had left the main group and conquered southern Italy.

They had worked with the surviving clans while planning to create another dragon age one day.

And 400 years ago, it had happened to them.

Their group and the surviving clans had been utterly destroyed in a single night.

They had only realized the truth of the matter after the Harmonic Unification War.

After deciding to settle in this land on Sasuke's suggestion, they had learned of those attackers' origins.

Whenever they described the central figure of that attack, the people always identified her outfit as that of a shrine maiden.

Their enemy was a Shinto force and a Far Eastern battle group.

They should not have existed in 13th century Europe of the Harmonic World.

For the dragons, that was the identity of the Testament Cross-Borders Unit that seemed to appear from nowhere and disappear without a trace.

It seemed the attacks on other areas had been led by representatives of other shrines. Most notably, there was one armored shrine maiden who had wielded a sword. She had been skilled in battle and had apparently hunted down the majority of the surviving clans' main force.

But the one that had attacked Sasuke and Saizou's group had used a cherry blossom flower as a symbol. That was the only difference.

That group wielded a seemingly divine power that could drive back even dragons and they were the identity of the Testament Cross-Borders Unit.

...Ohh...!

Because he was undetectable, he did not roar aloud.

Saizou moved in to hunt the enemy.

The dragon ran.

800 years ago, he had lost his king without a chance to face them.

400 years ago, the attack had been so sudden he was forced to retreat.

So this was his first time holding a proper battle that allowed for introductions. So...

...Let's do this...!

As he charged forward, Saizou saw something out of the corner of his eye on the left: blades.

The wolf's chains had taken them from the Date Vice Chancellor to the left. There were six of them in all.

They could not stop the dragon's charge, but...

...It can't be...!

Saizou's bestial eyes widened as he saw something in the center of his vision. Unlike the two girls behind her, the silver wolf was not looking up into the air. She was directly facing him with her eyes closed.

"...!"

Saizou gasped, but this was not worth feeling shock over.

He saw this as a continuation and a beginning.

It was a continuation of the battle from 400 years ago, but it was also their first confrontation.

So he sent out every attack he could muster.

He used everything for the hunt.

Everyone in the hall saw sparks scattering around Mitotsudaira.

But not from a swordfight.

She had no opponent.

Her body was swaying as she swung her arms and chains around like some kind of one-girl show.

"...!"

The silver wolf rapidly sent out the mandible swords. Each time, sparks and light scattered.

The sounds were loud and numerous. And finally...

"If you are to run, let your body ring."

She sped up as if pushed on by Kimi's song.

Countless Summit Dance shields appeared around the wolf.

"Let heat permeate your heart like the roaring sea."

As they shattered, Mitotsudaira did not even bother raising her swords

anymore. She instead used the momentum provided when the swords were deflected by the unseen enemy.

“The shooting stars fly toward the deserted flower garden.”

Within the sparks, the wolf incorporated her attacks and other movements into a dance of her own.

...What the heck is this?

Masazumi honestly admitted she had no idea what was going on.

Mitotsudaira had her eyes closed while she danced within a storm of endless clangs, light, and sparks.

She spun her arms, twisted her body, and used it all to provide more speed as she sent out the blades.

The swords were launched from her hands, swung around by her chains, and...

...Deflected...!

But the wolf did not allow the blades to fly away. Like a fanged mouth snapping shut, she would catch the airborne blades once more. With her eyes still closed, she started forward as if in search of something.

“———!!”

She advanced step by step, and...

“Have some more, Mito Lord!”

The Date Vice Chancellor tossed the wolf four more blades. They flew toward the advancing storm of sparks and light, but once they were within range...

“They disappeared?”

No.

The noise and sparks suddenly doubled in intensity. And Mitotsudaira leaned forward while swaying her body to the left and right.

“Loup.”

Masazumi could see Mitotsudaira's hands shoot out and grab the airborne blades' hilts for just an instant.

But that was as far as she could see.

Instead, something else came into view: the enemy's blades.

Several dozen simultaneously-fired scythes of light drew arcs in the air.

Each glowing blade was twenty meters long.

They were made of ether. They must have been too pale to notice normally, but now that they were overheating, a yellow light surrounded them.

That was the enemy's primary weapon.

But Masazumi was confused as she watched Mitotsudaira send her own unseen blades to clash with those rapidly-fired blades.

"How can Mitotsudaira see those?"

They had to be nearly invisible at that speed, so how could she see them coming?

"Nate's got a good nose," said the idiot with a smile in his voice. "When Horizon and I were cut, our blood must have gotten on him. ...And that lets her see the coming attacks. Or smell them, I guess."

"You idiot, the scent can't possibly propagate faster than those attacks, can it?"

It was not the idiot who answered that question.

It was Mukai. She was sitting with her knees together atop Adele's mobile shell.

"The scent is...carried by the wind...and the surrounding air...and that reveals...him," she explained. "So Mitotsudai...ra-san...is surrounded by Toori-kun...and Horizon's...scent."

Mitotsudaira was intoxicated by the scent.

Last night and the night before that, she had been exposed to her king's scent

quite a bit thanks to sleeping with her head on his lap or elbow. The scent of his breaths had permeated her as they slept and it had refused to come out during the day, but telling him would have accomplished nothing and all it did was make her feel some Loup-Garou-style guilt.

But here, something even more powerful reached her: blood.

Her king and princess's blood.

She had not smelled his blood from this close since middle school. She had learned that scent alongside her tears when they had established their king/knight relationship back then.

The foolishness that led to it being spilled showed she had not changed since then.

No matter what her king or her princess said, she had said she would protect him and then failed to do so.

So she had decided she would use his blood to achieve victory.

She would vindicate herself using the very blood that had been shed due to her carelessness.

In the past, it had been blood of a promise and of tears. But now, she would offer her king the blood of victory. And...

...Here it comes!

Within the many attacks, the slight scent of her king reached her from the enemy's body.

It was faint, like it was being fanned over to her, but that was exactly why it sharpened her sense of smell as it stroked across her cheeks and brushed through her hair.

It tickled.

The more she crossed blades with the enemy, the more of her king's scent reached her from his blades and the wind.

Compared to what she had smelled in her sleep, the blood scent was much thicker and made her think of solid flesh.

That thick scent mixed with her memories as it embraced her dancing body. It intoxicated her.

She wanted to loosen her collar and let it reach her chest and the rest of her body. She wanted it to stroke her throat, pass through her lips, and tease the back of her teeth and her tongue.

But this scent was not strong enough for that. So...

“...Is that all!?”

Mitotsudaira raised her voice with her eyes still closed. She danced, swung her body around, and launched the swords as she spoke.

“You need to hit me with more than that!!”

Chapter 54: Embraced One in a Roaring Space

第五十四章

『咆吼空間の抱擁者』

いつも私は
身を赦す
配点 (芳香)



I always

Give myself over to this

Point Allocation (Aroma)

Saizou clashed with the enemy.

He raised both his arms and sent his long scythe blades forward.

...You fool...!

He increased the number of blades from tens to hundreds and moved in to crush the enemy.

...Begone...!

The ether blades glowed red as they overheated and he slammed them toward the silver wolf.

But the enemy endured. She knocked back his consecutive slashes and moved forward.

How could she do this? These attacks used all of his great strength as a dragon. He converted his dragon cannon ether into ultra-thin ether blades, extended them to more than twenty meters in length, and sent them forward with his dragon strength.

How could she stop his attacks and...

...Advance on me like this!?

It did not matter if his attacks were horizontal, vertical, swung like a scythe, or jabbed forward.

“...!!”

They all harmed the silver wolf's skin. These attacks were made after shattering the many defenses placed around her by the songstress.

But those wounds were immediately healed.

That was a beastman's special ability. Dragons had it too, but this enemy was different.

“Allow me to teach you something.” The wolf’s cheeks were flushed and her tongue poked out from her lips. “Do you know what happened in Europe after all of you left 400 years ago? ...Dragons are nonhumans. So in what eventually led to the Technohexen hunts, the nonhumans around Europe were persecuted. At first, it was only the dragon-like ones and those with reptilian or amphibian forms. But it soon spread to the beastmen, the spiritual species, and everyone else. So...”

So what?

“In order to fit in better with the humans, the nonhumans fought on the front lines of many battles and were treated like expendable pawns. It was common for the nonhuman units of two nations to end up clashing and killing their own kind. But there was something the nonhumans learned through all this.”

Solid sounds rang out.

“How to fight against nonhumans.”

Those words were accompanied by another sound.

“The humans had developed techniques for defeating nonhumans. So what if nonhumans learned those and used them?”

The sound did not stop. But what sound was it? And...

...Flowers!?

Saizou saw red flowers scattering all around them.

Is that blood? he wondered.

It was not.

It was his blades. The hundreds of overheated blades had all shattered.

Countless pieces of red light scattered and a closed-eyed smile spoke from beyond them.

“Unfortunately, I did not receive much training in anti-nonhuman techniques. ...My mother was only interested in eating humans, so I only know what I was taught in the academy.”

However...

“I know enough to deal with a dragon.”

Narumi rewrote her mental estimation of the Mito Lord’s skill.

...She’s fighting a much rougher battle than I imagined.

Narumi had expected the girl to primarily fight in a more elegant and classy way.

But that was not the case.

She truly was a wolf. She charged in toward the enemy, pursued them, and latched her jaws onto their throat before they could attack.

She did not even check to see what her enemy was doing. She would rather crush them than observe them. And if that was not good enough, she would endure the attack and then go for the throat.

To pull that off, she did not adjust to match her opponent. She simply kept her own balance using just the direction of her own power and she made the battlefield her own territory.

...She really does have a queen’s blood.

That made her a difficult opponent for someone like Narumi who carefully cornered her opponent and made sure she was guaranteed to finish them off.

“But I’m impressed by her strategy too. ...She provoked her opponent to get below him.”

The Mito Lord appeared to still be receiving the attacks as the ether blades were swung down toward her.

But she was not.

That was clear from the continuous solid sounds and the glowing red fragments of the shattered blades.

“Even with the dragon’s strength behind the attacks, she targets a point without that force behind it. The base of a sword’s guard doesn’t pick up much speed even when it is swung. It does gain decent power, though.”

“Oh.” The English Princess looked back toward Narumi. “That is a lot like what

Master Tenzou explained to me earlier. The speed at the tip and the speed at the base are different, aren't they?"

"Judge, that's right. That black dragon is producing hundreds of blades right now. If you're at the tip of those attacks, you have to deal with the full speed of those slashes. But if you move in closer, the attacks are a lot denser, but their speed is lower. And...when the slashes are slower, targeting them and shattering them with a hit from the side is a simple enough task."

Even more solid sounds rang out. They were high-pitched sounds that carried into the distance. They never seemed to stop.

"We will see the enemy's trick before long."

As soon as Narumi said that, the silver wolf sank down even sooner than she had expected.

Hundreds of red blades had been swung down from overhead to crush her.

...Well done.

But the Mito Lord ducked even further down and charged within the arcs drawn by the blades.

From there, she stood back up while carrying mandible swords horizontally on her back.

"That hit."

The momentum of the hundreds of slashes collided with the mandible swords that rose up in a counter attack.

Countless sounds much like breaking glass rang through the air.

The dragon's hundreds of blades had all been shattered at once.

Red flowers scattered. The red lights danced and blossomed like a blizzard.

Within that storm, Saizou watched his enemy while he kept his form hidden.

The enemy was there. She had her hips lowered and blades jabbing overhead from her back.

“————”

She discarded them to either side.

Her blades were no longer usable. Not one of the ten blades had survived and only the hilt remained for four of them.

But, thought Saizou. I still have blades leftover.

Some of his hundreds of shattered blades had survived. That was thanks to the absolute difference in quantity.

He only needed one to cut down the enemy before his eyes.

So he gathered strength in his arms. Between his left and right arms, he had a total of seven blades.

So this will work, he thought as he raised the attack.

“Oh...!”

A voice escaped his lips. He was about to settle one part of what had happened 800 and 400 years ago. So...

“Ohhh...!”

He relaxed all excess strength. The slashes slipped surprisingly smoothly through the air as they left his hands.

Losing all the other blades must have lightened the load because all air resistance seemed to have left those seven swords as they moved in toward the silver wolf.

They were going to hit.

But the silver wolf moved just before they did.

She suddenly kneeled down and kept her body low.

Was she buying time until the blades hit? Was she shifting where they would hit? Or...

...It can't be...!

The kneeling pose gave Saizou a view of something beyond her: an enemy.

The shrine maiden was aiming an arrow his way.

“Kh.”

It was a scattering arrow. That was why the silver wolf had gotten down.

Meanwhile, Saizou was in the middle of swinging down his swords.

He was unable to dodge and the blast hit him.

Explosive pressure raced out and the power passed through him.

The undetectable dragon's trick was revealed to everyone there.

Twelve meters ahead of where Mitotsudaira kneeled, a figure was nearly blown away by Asama's arrow but managed to endure it.

It was not a dragon.

“A human...!?” shouted Masazumi.

A slender-faced man in black clothing stood there with shimmering heat rising from his entire body.

“...Kiyonari, he's just like you.”

Tenzou slowly nodded.

“Dragons can transform into humans. ...That would explain how that black dragon disappeared. In the instant after the transformation, he hid himself with the same sort of invisibility techniques that I use. And a dragon's power is too much for a human to fully control, so he sent it out as blades in a way only a humanoid form could.”

Meaning...

“This was a trick taking advantage of the human fear that tells us a dragon would never take on a weaker form.”

Mitotsudaira looked to her opponent.

His hair stood on end and his skin was dark. Blood flowed from his entire body and he looked to her with his hips lowered. His arms were held forward in a guarding pose, but in truth...

...That's just the result of swinging those blades.

The others who had retreated began to speak when they saw the truth of Saizou's undetectable form.

It started with her king.

Me: "Y'know..."

Silver Wolf: "Hm? What is it, my king?"

Me: "Why is he wearing clothes?"

Almost Everyone: "Why do you always say the things we're trying to tactfully avoid...!?"

When someone as large as a Celestial Dragon transformed, the "excess" was likely stored in another dimension.

His human form would also be drawn from there, so it was not a simple transformation.

But Mitotsudaira spoke words of thanks.

Silver Wolf: "I must thank you, Suzu. You too, Tomo."

Bell: Eh? F-for what?"

Silver Wolf: "You had figured out the enemy's trick the night before last, hadn't you?"

When the Celestial Dragons had appeared on the Musashi the night before last, Suzu had responded to Saizou in particular.

On the academy bridge, she had reached a hand out into empty space and said something that showed she had seen through to Saizou's presence there.

Saizou had appeared there as a dragon, but Suzu had seemed confused.

If she had sensed them as dragons, she would have said so.

That meant Suzu must have sensed something else.

Something with a dragon's presence but a human form.

That was why the defense barriers had not caught either of the enemies afterwards.

It also explained why Asama's quarantine system had not caught them. Most likely, they had entered Musashi through the proper route while in human form.

They used that transformation ability as a form of stealth. And it was the same here.

"Suzu was facing straight forward when that black dragon was undetectable."

She had not simply been looking in the enemy's general direction.

"You sensed the enemy at about the same height as us, didn't you?"

Mitotsudaira had used the direction and height of Suzu's gaze to confirm her suspicion that the enemy had a human form. Narumi's reaction had also helped since that girl had probably seen through the trick as well.

"And of course, something seemed off about the height the scent of my king's blood was coming from."

Asama had gathered all of that information and sent it to her.

"So," said Mitotsudaira while facing her enemy. She spoke to that man who was surrounded by shimmering heat from all the blood spilling from his body. "I won't say anything. I know dragons do not want human pity. But I will do the bare minimum required of me as a knight."

Mitotsudaira stood proudly tall and raised both hands.

A mandible sword flew into each one.

She wrapped her fingers around them and she threw one of them upwards.

It spun high above and, due to the weight of the tip, it fell with the point of the fang shape aimed down.

With a dull sound it stabbed into the earthen ground right in front of Saizou.

Mitotsudaira raised her mandible sword in front of her forehead and asked a question.

"What will you do?"

The dragon roared.

“...!”

He instantly abandoned his human form and took on a dragon form that was wet with black blood.

...Kh!!

His entire body ached. He had been hit with an anti-dragon blast while in his human form. He was lucky to be in one piece and for all his senses to be functioning.

But he forced himself to move.

...I must do this! Because....

“I will settle this, humanity!!”

On the third step, strength returned to his knees. So...

“I will finally settle this...!”

Saizou approached as a dragon. As a mass of power, a symbol of fear, and a representation of absolute selfishness.

“———!”

He charged.

The hall shook, he raised his body, and he attempted to slam all of his power toward the knight before his eyes.

He used his forelegs, his jaws, and his entire massive body.

He moved forward, but he heard a sound and saw something.

Ahead and at the ground, the wolf had raised her mandible sword.

Some things were reflected in that blade: his charging form, the blue sky, and...

...A shell!?

The silver wolf asked once more.

“What will you do?”

Asama gasped.

...Is he going to dodge it!?

All of the penetrating arrows she had fired so far had had no homing ability but had some trajectory control.

After flying into the distance, they had flown in a large arc and returned. That was all that their trajectory control could do, but that created a time-lagged surprise attack on the enemy. She had fired three such arrows.

But Mitotsudaira must have let him see them out of a knightly sense of chivalry.

Saizou chose to evade.

Without even looking back, the black dragon swung his body left and right to avoid the three shots.

His entire body was badly injured, so it had to have been difficult to move much. But with a great roar and tremor, the black dragon sent dirt flying and completed his evasion. And from there...

“Ohhhhh...”

He sent a sword out in a straight line.

The ultra-thin blade extended from his raised right foreleg and he sent it toward Mitotsudaira.

But Mitotsudaira turned to face Asama.

She held her mandible sword’s hilt between her right index and middle finger, swayed like a dancer, and shut her eyes. She spoke with a smile on her lips.

“My king. ...The scent of your blood is embracing me from behind.”

The wolf’s instantaneous action sprang up along the hands of a clock.

In an instant, it pierced the descending blade from the side as if scooping it up.

It shattered.

The dragon's final blade was destroyed.

Chapter 55: Passerby in a Place of Descent

第五十五章

『潜り場の通り過ぎ人』



お別れではなく
ただ振り返り
言葉をかわす
配点 (穴埋め)

This is not a goodbye

We are simply looking back

And exchanging words

Point Allocation (Filling a Hole)

Saizou realized something.

He could not move his legs.

Even though he had been performing so many evasive actions and had just been charging forward.

...What is this?

His legs would not move as if the soles of his feet had sprouted root.

He tried moving forward.

...No.

It's no use, he decided.

He could not move. So...

"Fine, then."

With that, he collapsed forward.

And he belatedly remembered that the sun was shining on the center of this hall.

That warm sunlight made him sleepy. And...

...That's right.

Small, firefly-like lights rose from his body.

That was the ether light that composed his body.

His "mold" as a dragon had lived for nearly a thousand years, but it was old, falling apart, and attempting to return to heaven.

I can't believe this, he thought. *I really have gotten old.*

So he simply said what he had to say.

“Be careful down there. Sasuke is taking this seriously. And...”

While lying on the ground, he sensed a movement within the ruins.

“These ruins are going to collapse soon. ...So hurry.”

Asama nodded at the dragon’s words.

It was true the ruins were both rumbling and...

Unturning: “They’re tilting. Only a bit though. Still, they were already somewhat tilted, so I doubt this is going to stop.”

Vice President: “I guess I should ask Naito and Naruze to prepare for a rescue...”

“That’s right,” said the others as they exchanged a glance and hurried toward the passageway deeper into the ruins.

Asama’s group followed. They first moved into the sunlight in the center of the hall.

While she ran, Asama pushed on Mitotsudaira’s back. So did Kimi as she caught up from behind.

“Mito, are you tired?”

“N-no, I’m still fine.”

“If you have to say ‘still’, then you’re not fine at all. ...Get my foolish brother to rub your chin later.”

Since Mitotsudaira gave a sigh of bitter laughter instead of protesting, she must have been truly exhausted.

However, there was a dragon in the center of the hall. He was falling asleep and scattering into the sky.

When she passed by, Asama decided to do whatever she could to help.

She had permission for the Asama Shrine to intervene in this land, so...

“Submit.”

She came to a stop and paused for a moment, but then she purified and tuned the surrounding space.

The ether contained in a Celestial Dragon-sized “mold” was trying to return to heaven and to the ley lines. She figured it was only polite to purify it.

When she did, the dragon moved his head a little.

“You.”

He was large, but once she paid attention, she realized he had the voice of a child.

She sensed no ill will or malice there. And Hanami detected no hostility.

So Asama responded.

“What is it?”

Asama listened to the dragon’s words.

“Do you always do that?”

Behind her, Mitotsudaira stopped and took a fighting stance, so Asama gestured for her to relax.

...Always?

Did he mean the purification?

If so, her answer was obvious.

“You can think of this as Shinto etiquette. When a soul is freed, we give it the comfort of purification so that it might permeate this land and world, become a local god, and be reborn someday. That is how it has been since the Age of the Gods before even the Age of Dawn.”

“...Is that so?” asked the dragon. “Hey, do you know...a shrine maiden...that wears a...cherry blossom symbol?”

Asama’s eyebrows rose somewhat.

...Well, yes, I do...

While wondering why he was asking, Asama answered his question.

“We used that on our old equipment.”

The dragon opened his eyes a bit at that.

His weak eyes looked her way and then looked to the objects piercing the ground around him.

He saw the three penetrating arrows there.

“I...”

Asama did not know what he was trying to say, but a thought occurred to her.

He had dodged her trick shot in the very end. So...

“You defeated me here.”

When he heard that, the dragon narrowed his eyes.

“Ohhh.”

He let out a long breath. He was most likely using the last of the air remaining in his lungs.

“...At long last.”

Horizon spoke while looking back at the dragon who had ceased to move.

“I wish I had been able to speak with him.”

“Didn’t we speak with him plenty?”

“Did we?”

“Judge,” said the idiot as he ran alongside her, took her left hand, and grabbed her left arm.

Asama’s healing charm was wrapped there.

The idiot squeezed her arm at that spot.

She felt pain. It was a mechanical arm, but she could not hold things properly without a sense of pain. As a machine, however, she was capable of shutting out the pain reaching her.

“Remember that,” said the idiot. “We both confirmed how serious the other

side was and left something with them.”

She did not understand a part of that, so she asked about it.

“Left what?”

“...Eh?”

“Don’t tell me you just thought that sounded cool.”

“Eh? Umm, w-well, it’s kind of hard to put to words...”

“Think before you speak!!”

Just as Horizon prepared a right punch to reinforce everyone’s *tsukkomi*, Asama, Mitotsudaira, and Kimi caught up from behind.

“Are you two oka-...ah! Toori-kun, why are you squeezing Horizon’s wound!? I didn’t think you were that kind of person!”

“What happened to your worry for me!?”

But Horizon ignored the idiot and sighed. And then...

“I do not understand.”

“Understand what?” asked Mitotsudaira.

While walking and while aware that she was at the center of them all, Horizon opened her mouth to respond.

“When is the right time for us to live and to die?”

That question had been on her mind lately.

She wished they could just never lose anything, but all things were eventually lost and went away. She knew keeping things from being lost required work, but she also had a question.

What was the best way of handling the times when something was lost and went away?

If they felt they had handled it in the best possible way, those left behind would feel self-satisfied instead of sorrowful and that would somewhat reduce the pain.

So she asked her question.

...When is the right time for us to live and to die?

And...

“Did that person meet a proper end here?”

“You’d have to ask him to find out,” said the idiot next to her.

But Horizon felt his answer was useless. After all, you could not ask someone once it was already over. So...

“He has already gone away, so how are we supposed to ask him?”

“Huh? There’s another one, ain’t there? And there are a ton more after that. ...So let’s go ask them what they think about going away. And...”

Did you know?

“Sanada’s gonna be crushed. So we can ask them what they think about their coming defeat.”

Horizon could accept that.

...True enough.

The leader of the Sanada dragons was fighting down below.

The occasional tremors they felt were proof that Futayo and Gin were fighting that dragon.

Horizon faced forward while hoping those two were safe.

“Let us go.”

She squeezed the wound on the idiot’s arm, drawing out a cry of “nwohhhhh!”

“I would like a lesson on life from a Celestial Dragon who has lived for a thousand years. If he is willing to teach us, I would like to learn.”

Chapter 56: Optimizer in the Field of Acceleration

第五十六章

『加速領域の最善手』



どこまでだと問うて
そこまでを見せるなら
そこまでの決着を与えよう
配点 (迎撃)

If I ask how much

And you show me how much

Let us settle things that much

Point Allocation (Interception)

The battle intensified.

The white dragon named Sasuke released a dragon cannon of explosive light all around him and turned the other way without checking on the results.

The enemy had moved beneath him to use her spear's cutting power, so he had released the dragon cannon to show her it was useless.

From the enemy's perspective, the counterattack was sent down from above.

That should have been impossible to dodge, but...

...Did she avoid it!?

He was almost certain of his prediction: The enemy had worked together to avoid his dragon cannon.

He followed that prediction by looking to the wall.

There was a hole gouged there.

A shell had caused that.

The enemy was not there, but it clearly told him that the enemy had indeed avoided his dragon cannon.

How?

The method was simple and the sound he heard explained it.

It was the echoing sound of shellfire. It was a simple sound of the air being torn and split. But there was only one person on this battlefield who could produce it.

He turned around and looked over to see a girl wielding a long cannon by the opposite wall.

“Did you fire on your companion!?”

And he heard another sound: racing footsteps circling around behind him.

They belonged to...

...The Musashi Vice Chancellor!

The enemy had definitely been knocked away by a shell.

...That was a close one!

In the instant of her evasion, Futayo had seen the approaching shell and recalled the night before last.

She remembered her battle with Kakei.

Back then, she had kicked off of his bullets to leap.

But those had been bullets. She had caught the first shot on Tonbo Spare's shaft to raise her speed like a running start.

This was different. It was an artillery shell and she could not use Tonbo Spare as a running start shield.

But there was a way to accelerate.

...Take the ideal action like I did against Lord Shibata and Fukushima-dono.

She had to repeatedly open and control instances of Soaring Wings to add extra precision to her movements. She would use the acceleration spell to fine-tune and eliminate all hesitation from each and every one of her body's actions.

Doing so required placing a great number of Soaring Wings instances on her body. If one of the spells on any part of her body were to break, it would create a ripple effect across her entire body and send her flying.

But what if she used that to accelerate?

I can do this, decided Futayo.

...But...

Now that I think about it, that was a dangerous thing I did at Novgorod.

I trained with Kimi-dono beforehand, but that was with her support. Looking at it that way, I must have been really worked up when I fought Lord Shibata and Fukushima-dono.

Yes.

This is dangerous.

Very, very risky. Gin-dono is asking for a lot, expecting me to kick off a shell without warning like this.

This is different from the bullets the other night. This is so much bigger and more destructive.

So if possible, I would like to find some other method.

“Oh, the shell is right in front of me.”

A single thought entered Gin’s mind in the instant Futayo avoided the dragon cannon: *That was a direct hit.*

After all, the Musashi Vice Chancellor had been entirely defenseless.

Despite having a dragon cannon approaching fast, Gin slapped her forehead.

But the word “idiot” was not what filled Gin’s mind.

...Die (just once)!

She added the parentheses in her mind because she had trouble deciding whether it was better with or without that part.

But then she saw something else.

An incredible number of spell sign frames appeared across the back of the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s body.

It looked to Gin like the girl’s movements slowed.

But that was not the case. The initial speed was slow, but it clearly accumulated. And by the time the shell arrived...

“—————”

The Musashi Vice Chancellor looked her way.

She lightly raised her right hand. It was like a casual greeting.

Gin had no idea what this meant, but...

“...!”

She leaped. And Sasuke’s explosive light burst across the hall as if to pursue her.

This was the same process as before.

“Honestly,” said Gin as the battle continued. “How much do I have to go along with your nonsense?”

Well done, thought Sasuke.

He had met several acceleration spell users in the past.

His power was light and speed, so people who wanted the same had always stood in his way.

They had faced him using Holy Spells, divine spells, other types of spells, machines, and martial arts techniques.

When avoiding his dragon cannon, this enemy had reached a rare level of speed.

He did not often see someone with that kind of instantaneous speed.

Not often. So Sasuke spoke.

“If that is all you have, I have faced others at your level.”

With that, he accelerated. He swung his entire body toward the Musashi Vice Chancellor who was trying to circle behind him.

“...Let us do this!”

He moved the other way to circle behind her from the center of the hall.

...Well done!

Futayo was impressed by the white dragon who had run up behind her.

How much speed could he draw out of that giant body? And more importantly...

“What excellent positional control!”

The white dragon was running along the wall.

While making a high-speed turn to circle behind her, he had used the wall as a floor.

The hall shook while he accelerated toward her as she moved along the floor. And in the instant he descended from the wall and passed over the seam between the floor and wall...

“...!”

He swung his tail forward and toward her.

This was his two-stage acceleration.

He already had enough speed to use the wall as a floor and he accelerated again while descending from the wall.

A shadow appeared overhead. The pursuing dragon’s head was extended forward in his running motion and it had arrived above her.

And his mouth was opened. His running roar was a dragon cannon that used its great volume to attack.

Instead of being released from his entire body, this was a straight-line dragon cannon fired from his mouth.

Futayo raised her voice in response.

“Gin-dono!”

Sasuke saw a girl move in front of him as he pursued his enemy.

It was Tachibana Gin.

She was not just using her legs to run. She was using an acceleration spell.

“A pursuit type...!?”

A new challenger had approached using the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s

acceleration.

He knew what she was after: The mouth he had opened for the dragon cannon.

He did not see it often, but the inside of his mouth was the color of flesh and his teeth and tongue were different from his exterior armor.

A shell could make it through and the Musashi Vice Chancellor's spear attack would be effective. That was why...

...They lured me into firing this dragon cannon!

Just as he thought that, he heard a voice. It belonged to the Musashi Vice Chancellor who held her spear in her right hand behind Gin.

"Bind...Tonbo Spare!"

The cannon and the cutting were fired toward his mouth simultaneously.

Gin's cannon blast produced an explosion of wind in front of her.

The fog was blown away in an instant and the Musashi Vice Chancellor shouted out while holding Gin in her right arm.

"Did we get him!?"

They had launched two attacks on the pursuing dragon. Timing-wise, it had to have been a direct hit. However...

"Kh...!"

Gin quickly used the strength of her prosthetic arms to shove the Musashi Vice Chancellor toward the wall.

She used the recoil to escape to the center of the hall herself. And in response...

"Gin-dono!?"

There was no point in answering the Musashi Vice Chancellor's question. She would see the answer soon enough. In fact...

"———!"

Before she could catch her breath, a beam of light stabbed through the space between the two girls.

It was fast for a dragon cannon and resembled an attack from a master spear-user.

Then Gin looked back to check on the enemy.

There was a white dragon behind her. He was unharmed. She could tell he had used some kind of method to forcibly stop himself and avoid their previous attacks.

...But how did he do it!?

She did not know. But staying still would be dangerous, so she immediately fired.

She was firing blind, but she had trained for this. She had a perfect grasp of where the dragon cannon had fired from.

So she fired.

She thought this would hit. Even if he was a high-speed and high-mobility dragon, his center of gravity would be shifted forward after braking so suddenly while pursuing them. That would force him to brace his four beast legs against the floor.

And she aimed her counterattack there.

There was no way this could miss. If he dodged this, it would have to mean he had no weight at all.

However...

“...!?”

Gin saw the dragon’s action.

He moved.

The white dragon had grown more distant behind her as she ran, but he suddenly leaped to the side.

And he did so easily.

At first, Gin did not understand how the enemy named Sasuke had been able to move.

That was because her mind had not allowed her any thoughts outside of “how?”

But her vision had calmly seen through to the principle behind his movement.

That white dragon could freely move because of...

...His tail...!?

That white tail gave off a sense of length, weight, and speed. He had used it for a two-stage acceleration earlier, but...

...Does he swing it to brake and slide as well!?

Before, he must not have dug his feet into the ground to stop his high-speed movement. He had used his dragon’s strength to swing his tail backwards, which pulled his giant body back as well.

And now he had used a swing of his tail to slide to the side, allowing him to...

“Dodge it...”

“Is something the matter?”

After landing from his sliding evasion, Sasuke slammed his strength and legs against the ground. He seemed to be kicking his claws and muscles at the dirt to accelerate toward her with his full-speed mobility.

He was coming.

During his sharply angled leap, he relaxed the tail he had swung sideways before.

“———”

And he reaccelerated.

The white dragon quickly approached.

“Is something the matter?” he asked again. “You’ve stopped moving.”

No, she was still running. She was using all her strength to get away from him.

But even that was nothing to this dragon.

As a dragon, he did not use his teeth against people. This white dragon simply fought by using his giant body to crush them.

“...!”

Gin fired a counterattack and used the recoil to leap back.

But he was still catching up.

Even Cuatro Cruz’s recoil was no match for the dragon’s reaccelerated dash.

He was going to hit her.

But Gin suddenly realized something.

She could see someone beyond the white dragon.

...Eh?

It was the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

“Huh?”

This is odd, thought Gin.

Hadn’t that girl been running alongside her just a moment before?

And hadn’t Gin shoved her toward the wall?

But at some point, she had ended up running along the wall beyond the white dragon. She was running along the outside and toward Gin. She ran in a curve that pursued the white dragon’s back.

...It can’t be...

It was a ridiculous prediction, but Gin allowed herself to make it.

She knew what the girl had to have done.

“Did she run the perimeter of the hall in that short time!?”

Futayo was thankful for the size and structure of this place.

If it was not a hemispherical hall, she could not have kept her acceleration up like this.

Soaring Wings was applied many times over to her knees and shoulders.

She had enough speed. Her exhaustion was reduced and everything felt clear. And...

“Sorry...!”

Just as she saw Sasuke dodge Gin’s shell, Futayo passed him by.

She moved forward. She reached out toward Gin as the white dragon threatened to catch up to her.

“Gin-dono!”

Her position shifted.

Before she could even say “oh?”, she had passed Gin by.

In another two steps, she would leave Gin behind.

...Oops.

Letting up on Soaring Wings now would be dangerous.

But if I do not save Gin-dono, I have a feeling the others would be mad at me.

...Should I make another circuit?

No, since everything feels so clear, it might be best to leave things as they are. In fact, I have no other choice.

However...

“There is no reason to reach out your hand.”

Gin was directly beside her on the right.

She had appeared suddenly, but...

“Ohh, so you survived...! I was about to give up on you!”

“If I didn’t have this pursuit-type acceleration spell, I would have died! I’ve been running around all over the place thanks to you!”

I angered her. I need to actually grab her next time. But...

“You sure have a short temper, Gin-dono.”

Gin had grown sick of so very many things here.

Tachibana Wife: “Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! ...I can’t stand this girl!”

<Divine Transmission Failure: The walls may be too thick: If correct, press “Y”. If incorrect, give up and smile: By, god.> She did indeed give up on a variety of things while a strange smile appeared on her face.

And even if I hit “Y”, wouldn’t the divine transmission interference prevent my response from getting through? wondered Gin, but she concluded the response must travel via the local gods.

However, there was nothing she could do while reliant on the Musashi Vice Chancellor running alongside her.

That girl was about to decide this battle for herself.

And...

“Gin-dono!”

“What?”

“My Tonbo Spare is useless right now!”

“Impotent,” said the spear.

“That doesn’t mean you can leave!”

The look of astonishment on the Musashi Vice Chancellor’s face could not have been more blatant.

After another three seconds of running, she shook her head and tried again.

“Gin-dono!”

“What!?”

“My Tonbo Spare’s cutting power does not work here!”

“Ineffective,” said the spear.

“How is that any different from what you said before!?” shouted Gin. “Isn’t a Vice Chancellor supposed to find a way despite that kind of setback!? Weren’t you taught that when you joined the Chancellor’s Officers!?”

The Musashi Vice Chancellor proudly puffed out her chest.

“I was made Vice Chancellor in an emergency!!”

Oh, right. And that was our doing, wasn’t it?

Gin gasped and felt like she had been hit by the return of an extreme long-throw boomerang. Then the Musashi Vice Chancellor held Tonbo Spare up for her to see.

“I bet I know what you were thinking, Gin-dono. You thought I would awaken to a mysterious power during this battle. You thought I would finally be able to use Tonbo Spare’s superior drive to cut right through that dragon’s light and whatever-you-call-it armor!”

“No, I wasn’t thinking any of...” started Gin, but before she could get it out...

“But you see! Tonbo Spare does not have a superior drive!”

“Training needed,” said the spear.

Tachibana Wife: “Master Muneshige! Master Muneshige! If I had a cursing card that let me kill whoever’s name I wrote, I would be justified in writing hers, wouldn’t I!? Wouldn’t I!?”

<Divine Transmission Failure: You may be too far away: If correct, press “Y”. If incorrect, do a dance: By, god.> ...Why is it different from before!?

Since arriving in Musashi, she had learned just how laid back Shinto was. Catholicism was very strict despite being developed in the irresponsible land of K.P.A. Italia, so what was this?

But...

“Gin-dono!”

“I’m aware!”

The racing dragon had fired a dragon cannon behind them.

Sasuke saw the enemy split up to the left and right. The blue went left and the red right.

But the blue on the left had no means of attack.

And the red on the right had no speed.

So he knew what they were bound to do.

...The blue pulls in the red and the red attacks.

His dragon cannon passed between them.

The red used a pursuit acceleration spell to bring them back together.

A moment later, the red and the blue worked together.

The blue launched the bottom of her spear forward and the red caught it on the palm of her metal hand.

...Huh!?

This was the opposite.

Wasn't the blue supposed to pull in and the red attack?

That was not what happened.

After the blue struck the red's hand with her extended spear bottom...

"Let's go...!"

She ran directly toward Sasuke.

"Bind...Tonbo Spare!"

Futayo controlled Soaring Wings in the midst of the rapid crossing of paths.

She was making a forced 180 degree turn. Even as she took the ideal movement for Soaring Wings, her body ached and was on the verge of being blown away by her speed.

"...!"

And she used that speed to send herself toward the white dragon.

Tonbo Spare's activation had no effect.

But she wanted to see exactly how the cutting power was deflected.

Her technique did not work on him, so she would find a way of overturning that.

And as she traveled through the cold air, Futayo saw some light.

Before reaching the enemy, Tonbo Spare's cutting power had been shattered into glowing shards.

It really could not reach him. That was unfortunate, but she had also seen something.

Tonbo Spare's cutting power had not simply been destroyed.

...It was fully reflected back...!

Tonbo Spare worked by reading the name reflected in the blade and cutting that. But this enemy reflected back that reflection, showing Tonbo Spare to itself.

Tonbo Spare could not attack itself, so its cutting power vanished.

That was a high-level defense used by people on her father or Muneshige's level.

This dragon did that with the armor covering his entire body.

He was naturally resistant to this sort of weapon.

Futayo spun around in their rapid crossing of paths.

A giant foreleg had fallen where she had been a moment before.

It produced a tremor, but the dragon did not move past her.

She understood why.

The white dragon was performing a turn directly above her.

He no longer saw her as an enemy and was simply attempting to crush her underfoot.

But Futayo set up a chain reaction in her body. She chained her rotation and turn together so she could move between those falling and swinging objects.

...Kh...!

She suddenly recalled her battle with Kakei.

Then too, she had spun around and taken up position behind her enemy.

“...!”

The two forelegs suddenly arrived overhead. Sasuke had swung his tail to control his position and lift his body up from the ground. And his raised forelegs seemed to be targeting her while he was at it.

...Don't look!

She would never respond in time if she looked up before dodging. To move around behind the forelegs, she moved...

...To the side!!

She moved out from below the dragon's belly as if launching herself.

Because he was making such a large turn, Sasuke's forelegs slid in a large arc to pursue her.

She dodged. She spun her body, and...

...Kakei-dono did this...!

She performed a turning slide.

It swung her body around more than she expected, and her empty hand...

“Oh.”

...touched Sasuke's foreleg. But she used that contact to push herself.

...One more time!

She felt like she had done a better job than last time, so she took her eyes off the enemy, rapidly launched herself across the center of the hall, and...

“Gin-dono!”

Gin did not overlook the opportunity provided by the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

When they had split up earlier, Gin had leaped toward the center of the hall.

And the Musashi Vice Chancellor had run straight forward to draw the enemy's attention. Or so she had thought.

...I can't believe she charged forward to test the enemy's defenses.

Tonbo Spare of course lacked any offensive power against this dragon.

But the enemy had reacted.

As a dragon, he could not overlook an enemy running around at his feet. Especially for this white dragon who was so confident in his high-speed mobility.

He had somewhat overreacted in his attempt to crush her underfoot.

He had been turning toward Gin, but he continued to turn a little further and raised his forelegs.

That was enough. Because...

...He has to lower his center of gravity to stomp!

This was not like his previous tail-controlled turn. Even if he tried to use that, his feet would slide along in a drift.

"Pierce him! Cuatro Cruz!"

Gin fired repeatedly.

Sasuke detected the enemy's attack.

He saw eight shells in the center of his vision. The rapidly-fired series of shots was lined up horizontally.

She was likely trying to capture him along that horizontal line.

It was a good decision.

The enemy's shells were meant to attack castles. A dragon's armor was sturdy, but there was no avoiding damage from this. And the line of shots was meant to negate any evasive action on his part.

Of course, the shell velocity was inferior to his strength. If he reaccelerated

with his tail, he could dodge it just fine.

...So it all comes down to this!

With that thought, Sasuke jumped forward. And he immediately reaccelerated to the...

...Right!

He launched his midair body to the right.

Or he should have. However...

“...!?”

He realized he had been thrown off the proper trajectory His rightward momentum was somewhat lacking.

As he wondered why, he sensed something else.

Something had struck the tip of his tail in the very instant he reaccelerated.

Based on how solid it was and how much the blow reverberated through his body, it had to be a metal projectile. But it was not one of those large shells meant for attacking castles. It was...

“A sniper shot from a smaller cannon!?”

It had likely been fired from behind the larger cannon’s rapid fire. The hit slightly unbalanced his tail.

That created a small waver.

But that miniscule difference was devastating when he was trying to just barely dodge before charging in.

One of the large shells hit his left collarbone.

Gin looked directly at the great cloud of dust created by the hit of an accelerated object and the water vapor explosion created by the shockwave. In the distance, she could tell the stone forming the hall had broken and crumbled with a sound like scattering sparks.

...I hit him!

She had sensed it connect. The shell had provided a solid blow.

She had set everything up to ensure it.

She had used an Arcabuz Cruz for that setup.

And she had lowered its initial speed as far as possible.

The shell she had chosen was setup with a focus on impact. That was all that mattered here.

After all...

...This enemy primarily uses his vision!

She had noticed something when Sasuke dodged her triple Cuatro Cruz shots soon after the battle began.

Cuatro Cruz's initial speed was greater than the speed of sound, but the white dragon had outdone that.

That meant he was not reliant on sound. He detected attacks with his senses of sight and touch.

So she had fired a low-speed shell high into the air while he was swinging his legs around to crush the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

On top of that, she had fired several times from straight ahead.

Since he primarily used his vision, he would see the eight shots flying in at eye level. Which way he would move had been a gamble, but she had guessed he would jump left due to the direction of his turn.

In the end, his swung tail had arrived in the position she had predicted.

"Now that we have struck back..."

Gin was about to finish her sentence with "this battle can truly begin", but at that very moment, a yell reached her from the direction of the dragon.

"Gin-dono...!"

It was the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

"To the left!"

Gin did not look left.

She simply activated Racing Words toward the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

The Musashi Vice Chancellor also began running as if in response.

And as Gin ran, she saw something arriving from the left.

It was the white dragon.

He was unharmed.

How strange, she thought. The shell had hit his left collarbone, so he should not have been able to move at full strength. Plus, he had been right in front of her when...

...The hit to the tail should have prevented him from reaccelerating!

So how had the dragon arrived to her left?

What was it she had sensed her shell hit earlier?

...Is this...!?

Gin did not look left. But a large presence arrived from that direction and covered her vision.

These were wings that came into view. The white dragon had six wings on his back. He had not used them before this, but now they were fully spread.

He had used them for a third acceleration.

“Ohhh...!!”

There was clear anger in his roar.

“...!”

Gin was hit and sent flying.

Sasuke felt shame.

...I cannot believe this!

He had underestimated the enemy and been forced to use his wings.

Even if he had wings and could fly, he specialized in ground combat. Using his

wings was normally unthinkable, but...

...These opponents were enough to require it!

He was impressed.

They had repeatedly endured or dodged his attacks, come to understand the traits of those attacks, and then worked to destroy them.

They had used a small attack to produce a waver in the dragon's giant body and great strength.

That was a truly human technique. And a sign of intelligence.

He could not simply trample over this enemy. So...

"To make up for the shame of using my wings, I must use my full strength here...!"

He charged toward the red enemy. He opened his jaws and held his mouth sideways to devour her.

Celestial Dragons did not really have to eat. As ether lifeforms, they only needed to remain in a place that matched their "mold".

To "eat" someone was a dragon's greatest sign of affection, as it meant allowing them to become a part of him. It was the highest praise for an enemy.

But an enemy arrived from the side in the instant he snapped his jaws shut.

It was the blue girl.

She raced toward the red girl, and...

"Gin-dono...!"

She extended a hand, but...

"Oh?"

The length of her pace did not quite match and she kneed the red girl instead.

Gin saw something completely insane.

Not only was that idiot idiotic enough to race across the hall so quickly, but

after looking like she was going to save Gin...

...She kneed me!?

Gin had fortunately managed to get her left arm up to guard in time because a direct hit would have broken a few ribs.

That was how much momentum the girl had.

She had wanted to work in a support role to help, but she could not even manage the most basic kind of assistance.

Not to mention that the Musashi Vice Chancellor was now in the same spot Gin had been.

Which meant...

“Ah.”

The approaching white dragon’s sideways jaws snapped shut on her.

...She’s dead!

Gin reached that immediate conclusion while she was flying through the air.

She felt both surprised and a little disappointed at how simple it had been.

...She’s dead! That girl is dead, Master Muneshige! Eaten by a dragon!!

She did not know if she should rejoice or celebrate. That was because even a warrior girl was not accustomed to seeing a dragon eat someone.

But Gin heard an odd noise lingering behind the action.

It was a solid sound like someone climbing a ladder. And it came from...

“The dragon’s jaws...!?”

Once she realized that, she saw a blue form several meters up in the air.

It was the Musashi Vice President. And if she was soaring there...

...That girl...

“Did she kick herself up from the closing jaws!?”

Sasuke was briefly confused.

He could have sworn he ate her. That thought was lodged in his mind. But the sensation in his teeth wiped away that confusion.

The enemy had rapidly run up the teeth of his closing upper and lower jaws.

Sasuke had never seen anyone dodge an attack like that before.

But that meant it was *his turn*. After all, the red girl was nearby and the blue girl was airborne.

Which meant...

“Ohh...!”

He fired a dragon cannon from his entire body.

Gin fired Arcabuz Cruz and accelerated, but she was still hit.

Futayo kicked off of the fired Arcabuz Cruz shell, but she too was hit.

After the light exploded, Gin was launched several dozen meters from the hall's center and slammed into the wall.

Futayo crashed into the ceiling.

They took damage.

Gin used her left arm to soften the blow, but its surface armor shattered when it hit the wall. When Futayo hit the ceiling, her hair decoration broke away, leaving only the string below, and blood dripped down her face.

It only took an instant.

They both grew limp, Gin fell to her knees, and Futayo seemed to peel away from the ceiling before falling.

The dragon roared in the center of it all.

“...!”

The white dragon spread the wings on his back and roared.

Chapter 57: Master in the Field of Acceleration

第五十七章

『加速領域の最高手』

どこまでだと問われたら
どこまでを見せるのか
どこまで行けるのかを考えよう
配点（追撃）



If you ask how much

And I show you how much

Let us think about how much we can do

Point Allocation (Pursuit)

“Things seem to be getting exciting down below.”

In the afternoon sun and inside the tent prepared at the entrance to the ruins, Oriotorai looked over while eating curry from a paper plate.

She was looking to Muneshige who stood at the entrance.

He had his back to the ruins and his hand on his chin.

Oriotorai asked about the slight wrinkle of his brow.

“Muneshige? ...Worried about Gin?”

“Judge, why would I be?”

That question stopped Oriotorai as she skewered a leek with a toothpick. She shrugged at the great roar heard from underground.

“Don’t things sound kind of incredible down there?”

“Judge,” agreed Muneshige, so Oriotorai asked another question.

“What if Gin is injured? And divine transmissions seem to be cut off.”

“True enough. I will only run down there on one condition.”

“What’s that?”

“Judge.” Muneshige smiled a little. “When she loses both her arms. I will not allow her to be harmed any more than that.”

Gin collapsed, but she just barely avoided falling to her knees.

...That’s right.

A warrior girl could not allow herself to fall to her knees during battle.

Yes. Something similar had happened several times in the past.

Before he had his inherited name, he had trained in her mansion's yard. He had fought her, he had been no match for her, he had grown too weary to support himself, and he had collapsed. She had told him that whenever he did.

So she would hold herself to the same standard.

Because he was now someone who would never collapse in the middle of battle.

"If his wife were willing to grow weak and leave everything to her husband..."

She got up.

"...it would disgrace the name of the Peerless in the West."

She stood up.

Her left arm would not move. It did not weigh her down due to the gravitational control, but combat motions were out of the question.

...Then I need to think of that arm as holding a shield.

She nodded and turned to place her left side forward.

Ahead of her, the dragon stood in the center of the hall. He had turned her way.

He crouched low with his six wings spread, so he was clearly not holding back at all.

"Tell me your name," he said.

"No need," she replied as she drew and prepared a Cuatro Cruz to her right. "There is only one person in the east to whom the Peerless in the West must name themselves."

"And that is?"

"The Peerless in the East, Honda Tadakatsu."

Gin filled her lungs with air.

And she gave a shout to rid her body of its remaining shaking and weakness.

"If you aim to be the Peerless in the East, you must defeat every last enemy in

this land! ...Honda Futayo!!”

A moment later, something crashed down into the white dragon’s back with the acceleration of a meteor.

That blue form held a spear vertically and scattered the color of shed blood as it fell.

“Musashi Vice Chancellor!!”

Futayo’s mind was still hazy, but she had woken up.

“Kh...”

Pain filled her body and some parts were trembling and numb.

The bleeding was especially bad. During the previous exchange, some of her armor had been knocked away and blood flowed from her shoulders and head.

Oh, no, thought Futayo. This is not good at all.

...The Testament says Honda Tadakatsu, Peerless in the East, was never injured during his entire combat history.

She was far from that now. So...

“At the very least, I must win here...!”

She fell toward the center of the white dragon’s back.

She was bleeding and unsteady, but she realized something.

...Eh...?

She saw something familiar on his back. She should not have felt this kind of nostalgia here, and yet...

“...!!”

Her mind fully returned to her.

Saying her mind grew clear was too kind an expression. It was more like her mind itself had been kicked awake. This awakening hit her like a tremor that spread from the tips of her toes to the top of her head.

And she could move just like she wanted. She targeted the nostalgia found on the white dragon's back.

“Ohhh...!”

She swung her entire body downwards and slammed the spear tip down.

Sasuke worked to shake off the enemy on his back.

It was the blue girl, Musashi's Vice Chancellor. However, her attacks were meaningless.

A dragon's back was their strongest area. The armor there could not be pierced by a mere spear tip.

This was proven by the solid sound as the spear tip was deflected.

And Sasuke was moving too. He ignored the Musashi Vice Chancellor on his back and moved forward. He would charge toward the red girl in front of him and crush her.

“...!”

So in an instant, he threw the blue figure from his back and made a three-stage acceleration straight ahead.

Sasuke broke the sound barrier.

At first, he was enveloped by a muffled roar, as if he were moving through water, but then an extreme lightness reached each of his body parts.

As he moved forward in search of that lightness, he saw something in his dim vision.

...Good.

His entire body grew lighter, as if he were shedding his skin and pushing himself forward.

Instead, a messy current of impacts washed over him as if pushing him forward and massaging him. But he loved that cold and rough feeling.

Speed was wonderful. The speed gained by using his strength to run was truly superb. Dragons had wings, but power came from one's strength. There was no substitute for the invisible space gained by an all-out run.

Sasuke continued forward. He would crush his enemy and turn just before reaching the wall. He would not allow even a three centimeter gap between himself and the wall. He would utterly crush the enemy and enjoy his perfect control.

"Good."

The joy filled his heart in advance.

But he viewed that joy as negligence. So to ignore the happiness in his heart, he raised his speed even further. He leaned forward and launched himself ahead once more.

He ran.

But as he did, he saw someone running alongside him on the left.

It was the Musashi Vice Chancellor he had just thrown from his back.

Futayo ran.

She ran alongside the dragon. With each step on the dirt floor, her speed gradually increased.

The source of her speed was not Soaring Wings.

...Is this...?

The sign frame for an Asama Shrine original spell had appeared behind her head.

It said Racing Words and it floated alongside a charm.

This was from Gin.

She had to have attached this to Futayo when Futayo had kneed her before.

It could only be used once and for a short period of time, but she could ride the dragon's acceleration for that time. So for three beats...

“...Nh.”

She reached a point where the momentum placed a great burden on her body.

This was hard on her body. Her constant bodily divine protections provided strengthening and exhaustion-reduction spells, but not even they could support her if her speed increased further.

Of course they could not. When Gin and Muneshige used this kind of spell, they would also use powerful cooling spells. But Futayo was grateful that she could return to the battle, even if it required this kind of burden.

Her body was overheated, she was starting to sweat, and she was bleeding again.

She was lucky. The blood flowing from her shoulder was stopped by the armor on her arm, so it did not affect her grip on the spear.

So the only other thing to worry about was the enemy running alongside her.

“...!!”

Are you doing this, dragon? Or should I call you Sasuke-dono?

I had felt like the only reason to fight you here was “duty”, but...

“I will be your opponent here.”

Futayo changed spells. She was partially pushed away as the dragon tried to ram into her instead of just running, but she also ended Racing Words and...

“...Soaring Wings.”

She’s so light, thought Gin as she watched Futayo’s movements.

Before, she had moved her body primarily by running, but now she was simply placing all her speed into her body.

Most likely...

...This is her true form...!

This had to be what had defeated Muneshige.

And Gin had seen this during their battle.

After slipping through the return fire from Arcabuz Cruz and Cuatro Cruz, Futayo had passed Gin's many slashes and struck her.

She had not been intercepting the attacks Gin had sent her way.

Gin only realized it now, but...

...She was simply striking down everything that would obstruct her speed, wasn't she?

She was troublesome.

This girl is nothing but trouble, thought Gin.

After all, she was not looking at her opponent. She was merely pursuing her own speed, as if trying to catch up to her own back. So to battle her...

"You must first get her to notice you."

That was why Gin shouted to the high-speed blue charging in from dead ahead.

"Over here!"

Notice me.

"If you overlook this, I will beat you to the ground!"

With that, Gin used what she had prepared to get the girl's attention.

She fired her right Cuatro Cruz toward Futayo as a counterattack.

She fired it thrice.

Futayo was simply facing forward.

Oh? she thought when she saw three stone-or ball-like objects up ahead.

...Are they just sitting there?

They appeared frozen in midair.

So she jumped over one and...

"—————"

She stepped on another to continue on ahead.

A moment later, light reached her vision. It was a blade. A white blade reflected light toward her eyes as she hung in midair and began to fall.

She saw twin swords by the wall. They were being used as mirrors to shine light on her face.

Only then did Futayo realize who was by the wall.

“Gin-dono?”

Futayo landed.

Good, she thought. My body's heat, exhaustion, and pain are being purified.

So she ran. She sent her landing momentum forward and rode that speed. From there, she simply extended her left hand forward.

“...Gin-dono!”



Sasuke saw the enemy's actions.

What would that pair do now that they had regrouped by the wall? Would they go right or left?

...Right!

That was Sasuke's decision.

The blue girl, Musashi's Vice Chancellor, held her spear in her right hand. She held her left hand forward and the red girl responded by holding out her own barely-functional left arm.

The blue girl used her speed to pull the red girl along with her.

In that situation, she could only pull her to the right.

So Sasuke raised his tail back and to the left. By returning it to the front and right, he could pursue the enemy to the right.

That was his plan.

His eyes could see high-speed movements and they were locked onto the enemy's actions.

The enemy did not go right. Hand in hand, the two of them seemed to pull at each other by the wall.

“—————”

And they spun around.

It was almost like a dance. And during their two rotations, the red girl gained speed. Several acceleration spell sign frames appeared, and...

“Here I go.”

Just as he heard her voice, the enemy was there.

Right in front of him.

One was high and the other low.

The low one was the red girl on the ground right in front of him.

The high one was the blue girl running up the inner wall of the hemispherical hall.

They made simultaneous straight-line attacks.

They were fortunate the dragon had tried to jump to the right.

While his forelegs rose hesitantly from the ground, Gin charged forward.

She made it between them.

But the enemy reacted. He crouched down before she could bring out Cuatro Cruz.

She no longer had enough space to aim the large Cuatro Cruz vertically. But she still ejected it. She just aimed it horizontally backwards instead.

“I will be going on ahead.”

She used it to blast her own body forward. She passed below the dragon and out below his left side.

And from there...

“Go, Musashi Vice Chancellor!”

Futayo saw it.

As she jumped down in an arc from the hall’s ceiling, she saw something on the dragon’s back.

It was right in the center of his back.

There, where she had slammed the metal tip of her spear earlier, she saw a mark that resembled a crack.

She recognized its shape. It filled her with nostalgia.

“That is a cut from Tonbokiri!”

She did not know why it was there, but she knew who had to have made it.

“Did you do battle with my father at some point!?”

“The thing is, we all went to Edo together.”

A voice spoke in the forest clearing as a dragon roared in the distance.

It was Sakai. He was resting his elbow on a wooden table in front of a sign frame displaying “Musashi”.

“It was really only Ii and Sakakibara that had to go there, but Da-chan was a good sport, so he went with me for part of my journey around north. Of course, Oku was doing well back then, so he clearly just wanted to spend the night with her somewhere on his way back.”

“How about you stop reminiscing about the past and actually explain what happened in the past, Sakai-sama? Over.”

“Now, now,” said Sakai. “At the time, he had a prototype for Tonbokiri...well, Tonbokiri itself was a prototype for the Logismo Oplo, but this was before even that. It was used to test the cutting power and the later Tonbokiri was based on it. Its range was about five meters. But...”

“But? Over.”

“Yeah.” Sakai nodded, smiled a little, and looked up into the sky. “At the time, those ruins were a refuge for the dragons that had escaped Shimabara. ...But, well, we were Matsudaira, right? It was the previous generation that suppressed Shimabara, but the dragons in the ruins still asked for a fight. They were plenty kind since they knew that Sanada’s Masayuki-san and the others would later join Matsudaira. Sasuke and the others understood their situation at the time.”

But...

“The Shimabara group still wanted to have their say, so we had an unofficial academy battle. ...The Shimabara Terrestrial Dragons were approaching the end of their lifespans, you see, so they wanted to go down fighting. Against the three of us.”

“Three, including Oku-sama? Over.”

“Yeah, although she insisted she only did it because Da-chan really wanted to do it. ...That said, she definitely had the most wins with all those Terrestrial Dragons she hunted down.”

“Did you come in last, Sakai-sama? Over.”

“Musashi” sighed, but Sakai raised the corners of his lips.

“No, no. I came in second.”

“Hm? You mean Lord Tadakatsu came in last? Over.”

“Judge. Da-chan only went for the big prizes. He focused on the biggest Terrestrial Dragons and ended it with a fight against Sasuke on the pretext of teaching him a lesson for not stopping the commotion.”

Sakai then looked to “Musashi”.

“Am I boring you with all these old stories?”

“As long as you are not mixing nostalgia with sorrow, I have no problem with it. Over.”

“That ain’t easy.” Sakai crossed his arms and looked up into the sky. “Since Masayuki-san allowed this, I can only assume Sasuke and Saizou have made up their minds. They must want to leave something behind when they leave this world. So I hope our kids give their all in these fights.”

“How does that make you feel as someone who has been left behind by others so often? Over.”

“Looking at the Testament, I should really have been the first one to go,” he began. “But I think our kids have the power to give Sasuke and Saizou what they want.”

Futayo prepared to attack while she dropped down.

Of course, Tonbo Spare’s attacks were ineffective against the white dragon below her.

But her father’s cut had reached him.

What was different between her and her father?

The specs or traits of their weapons?

Or, she wondered as she dropped toward Sasuke. But he moved below her.

Gin had circled around below him and forced him to lower his legs, but...

...Is he using his wings!?

The white dragon slammed his six wings down, using the recoil to lift his body.

He immediately moved forward.

With an instantaneous action, he moved several dozen meters and made a turn that seemed to simply reverse his front and back.

He had used the full power of his wings, his tail, and the twisting of his body.

Futayo was now falling right in front of him. Which meant...

“A dragon cannon...!”

As soon as she landed, a beam of light shot straight toward her.

Futayo simultaneously defended against and attacked the dragon’s blast.

She stabbed Tonbo Spare’s tip straight toward the oncoming attack.

This was not just a jab. She was running toward the dragon as she did it.

It hit and stabbed in, but...

...Pierce through!

Just as she thought that, something happened.

Light burst before her eyes.

It split, scattered, and shattered into a spray. And then...

“Ohh...!”

The outthrust spear tip destroyed the dragon cannon.

The glowing wind pummeled the surrounding area and piercing fragments filled the air.

Gin saw Futayo moving through that.

She was unharmed. She had fully pierced through the dragon cannon and

continued straight toward the dragon.

She was running forward.

...But what was that?

How had she shattered the white dragon's dragon cannon? Gin pondered the reason.

"Was it...light?"

The dragon had initially called himself a dragon of light. And after having her attacks deflected a few times, Futayo had realized that he reflected her attacks.

Tonbo Spare's cutting had no effect on this dragon of light.

But Futayo must have realized that, if her blade was reflected, then he was the same.

Just like the version emitted from his full body, Sasuke's dragon cannon was light.

So she had intercepted with a reflective surface: Tonbo Spare's tip.

By thrusting it into the light, it had reflected that power. And the dragon cannon's deflected power had enveloped her surroundings, broken, and fallen apart from within.

Futayo had done it.

But, thought Gin. That should not be possible.

She should not have been able to pull off a stunt like piercing the very center of an incoming dragon cannon.

Who could make a head-on counterattack against such an unbelievably fast blast of light?

But Futayo had done it. Gin did not understand how, but...

...This is...

This was what that girl was capable of.

And as the strands of light blew in the wind, the Musashi Vice Chancellor continued forward. That blue figure had lost her hair tie, so her black hair

fluttered behind her as she nimbly raced toward the white dragon.

And the white dragon responded.

“———!!”

He unleashed a roar and threw himself forward.

He attempted to collide with Futayo head on.

Sasuke roared.

It was a long, long roar.

He was a dragon and he had once been a corps commander of the Gaul Invasion Army.

He had made himself known through constant battle and slaying his enemies.

That had lasted 400 years. Another 400 years had passed since he had been defeated and forced to flee.

He had spent the same amount of time slaying humans and living alongside them.

But he had fought a human once during that life with them.

It was one of Sakai's friends. He believed the man's name was Tadakatsu.

After a few dozen minutes of battle with him, the man had avoided all his attacks, smashed his dragon cannon, finally split his back, and then said, “I'll leave it at this. You've still got stuff to do, don't you?”

That had reminded him of the past.

Of 400 years ago.

The Testament Cross-Borders Unit led by a cherry blossom shrine maiden had crushed his companions. There had been deaths on the other side as well, but the shrine maiden had asked a question after it was all over.

“What will you do?”

There were countless ways to interpret that question, but this was how he had responded: “Are you asking if I intend to continue fighting?”

“No.” The shrine maiden had lowered her eyebrows in a smile. “I am asking if you want to try a different lifestyle as a dragon.”

And...

“Can’t you wait until you have tried that out for a good, long while before you decide whether or not you wish to die?”

He had thought it was a clever way of putting it.

So he had done as she said. A lot of them had been frustrated, but...

...Twenty-odd years ago.

Someone capable of outdoing him had put a stop to that and said they still had “stuff to do”.

But now their lifespans were at their ends. Most of his friends had already left and Saizou had likely returned to heaven as well.

In that case, thought Sasuke. His battle here would act as a memento by sending those who inherited his will to Hashiba, but in addition to that...

...Shrine maiden of the past.

The white dragon thought to himself as he charged forward, slammed his feet against the ground and used his multi-stage acceleration to leap.

...We lived two different lifestyles as dragons.

They slayed humans and they protected them.

Even now, he was fighting to protect the future of Sanada’s people and attempting to slay those who would harm Sanada’s future.

But, he thought. *I already had that twenty-odd years ago.*

He had been given that by the shrine maiden 400 years ago.

So the white dragon gave voice to what he was settling here.

“This right here is the ‘stuff’ I still had to do...!!”

Futayo did not let up on her speed.

She would be in serious trouble if she did not continue moving forward and setting her center of gravity and central axis further and further forward.

She had to keep her axis straight for what she was about to do.

Which was...

...Send my cutting power into that dragon.

She knew she could do it.

She had figured it out from the fact that her father had done the same. She had only needed to ask herself how he could have done it.

And her thoughts had led her to a single answer.

Futayo moved straight forward to reveal that answer. She bent back as if to thrust her stomach forward and she charged in a straight line. She raised Tonbo Spare toward the enemy, who was charging toward her with a burst of speed, and she gave a cry.

“Bind, Tonbo Spare!!”

Gin saw the scattering light.

It was a spray of ether light. But it was not the rejection of a cut.

...Is that...!?

It was the destruction of a Celestial Dragon.

As he charged forward, Sasuke’s face was cut from the tip of his nose to his forehead.

The attack he had deflected and negated until now had suddenly hit him.

Gin’s vision had seen the position of the slash.

It had been along the dragon’s central line.

And Gin understood: it all came down to the central axis.

...That white dragon’s entire body, from the tip of his nose to the tip of his tail, is symmetrical.

The scales covering his body were angular and could reflect anything.

But while the scales down the center of his body were symmetrical, they formed a mountain shape.

The ridge of that mountain could not reflect anything. Due to the mountain shape, that reflecting power was slanted.

“So if she targets the ridge of the scales and hits that with her cutting power, it won’t be deflected...!”

That was why she had charged straight toward him.

That complete head-on attack had been to ensure she hit her enemy’s central line.

And she had raced toward him to ensure her own axis was not shifted.

If her timing had been even slightly off, the cut would have been deflected and she would have been sent flying.

But she had just passed below the dragon and come to a stop.

Her hair was undone and she spun Tonbo Spare around before propping it up against the floor.

A moment later, the white dragon rose up.

“Well done.”

With that, he wobbled. And he collapsed onto his side in the center of the hall.

He fell.

With a rumble, the hall shook, and Futayo opened her mouth.

Her dignified voice rang through the hall.

“White Dragon Sasuke...defeated...!”

Chapter 58: Reperformers on the Stage of Conclusion

第五十八章

『決着舞台の再奏者達』



何もかも全ては
見届けか見送りにこそ
配点（御指南）

Every single thing

Must be seen for yourself or seen off

Point Allocation (Instructions)

When Masazumi arrived in the hall, she saw the conclusion of the battle.

A dragon was collapsed on the floor and Futayo slowly sank to her knee before him.

It almost looked like she was kneeling in thanks.

...Am I starting to think like Neshinbara?

“Futayo!”

“I am fine. I will rest for a bit, so go on ahead.”

When she noticed the smile on Futayo’s face, Masazumi looked back to the others and nodded.

They had to continue on past this hall.

There were already faint tremors running through the floor.

“You should hurry,” said the dragon along with a rough breath.

He extended his forelegs, took a crouching pose, and then stood up.

“...You came here to visit underground, didn’t you?”

“Judge,” confirmed Masazumi before asking a question. “What’s below here?”

“Not even I know. ...It seems Saizou visited it in human form, though. Also... everything there now should only be what was gathered here twenty years ago.”

“Twenty years ago?”

“Yes,” said the dragon as he unsteadily rose fully to his feet.

Ether light scattered from his entire body like spilling blood.

He was preparing to ascend into heaven.

His end was nigh, but he still managed to speak.

“Matsudaira Nobuyasu inherited the place within here and began some kind of independent research. ...Then he committed suicide in there and Sakai came to destroy the facility on Motonobu’s orders. That was fifteen years ago,” he said. “Now, go. And return. ...I heard what you said, Musashi princess. You wanted to ask something about a dragon’s death, didn’t you? I will keep my life on this earth until you return. And...”

A tremor ran through his body, but he turned to face the other way.

Futayo and Gin were there.

He lowered his head a little and spoke to them.

“Can you...play along for just a while longer?”

“As you wish.”

Futayo nodded, stood up, retied her hair with a string, and raised her spear.

“Oh, great thousand-year-old Celestial Dragon. ...I seek your instruction.”

Giant forms moved through the sky.

Thawed regions dotted the snowy land and Yoshiaki looked to the sky in the center of one.

A few silhouettes hurried south in the sky.

Some were Terrestrial Dragons, but others were younger Celestial Dragons. Yoshiaki commented on the direction in which they were all headed.

“When a thousand-year-old Celestial Dragon dies not of old age but in battle, the dragons watch reverently from afar in the hopes of receiving their blessing.”

“Yoshiaki-sama, how do you know that, mon!?”

She nodded at the Mouse salmon next to her.

“Eleven Celestial Dragons traveled from Europe to Sanada. Of those, I hear eight were Non-Celestial Dragons and there were also plenty of Terrestrial Dragons. It was two Celestial Dragons and eight Non-Celestial Dragons who

previously inherited the names of the Ten Braves. Although all but three of the Celestial Dragons have since died...”

Yoshiaki lowered her shoulders.

A valley city opened up toward the ocean and its multi-layered structure was revealed by the shadows of the setting sun.

She walked toward the city with her eyes still on the sky.

“All I ever do is lose things, Shakenobe.”

“You still have me, mon!”

“Things are always so cheerful with you around.”

“That’s right, mon!” agreed the Mouse as more dragons flew by.

Yoshiaki narrowed her eyes at the sound of them slicing through the wind.

“This is an age of change, Musashi. This is a good night for drinking. But...”

She looked to the southern sky.

There, the sky still contained some light from the summer afternoon.

“I hope you can ask about the meaning of inheritance. And I hope you discover the mysteries of this world. ...I was unable to delve too deeply into either topic.”

A rumbling arrived from the hall behind them.

The battle has started up again, thought Narumi as she ran through the narrowing stone corridor.

The noise never stopped. The floor shook and the stone tiles occasionally rose from the ground.

Celestial Dragons were the greatest of the dragons, so Sasuke probably had no intention of holding back in his final battle.

Those Celestial Dragons had traveled across Europe. Narumi had seen Sasuke, Saizou, and the other Non-Celestial Dragons of the former Ten Braves a few times. When they held a joint festival known as the Oushuu Council, the

dragons had sometimes participated and drank with them.

They had lived peacefully with people for 400 years.

What kind of experience had that been for them? It had to have been a more restrictive lifestyle than the 400 years before that, but Narumi thought it had to have been more lively and fulfilling.

The floor and walls rang with the sounds of battle.

The Celestial Dragon was fighting to burn through the whole of his being.

The battle was a ritual to bring peace to his soul.

Narumi was glad those two girls were his opponents.

After all, the Musashi Vice Chancellor had an awkward fighting style. And she would not hold back or show sympathy for an injured opponent.

Meanwhile, they both threw all their strength at each other.

It was likely the girl's inexperience that had prevented her from getting in any solid hits other than the cut. She also needed more than an instant to reach her top speed with the Soaring Wings acceleration spell.

She had done well to fight so well while falling behind like that.

...Does she just have a sense for it?

As Narumi wondered that, she found the Musashi Vice President had moved out ahead.

There was no point in telling her not to. Narumi just had to move out ahead of her. However...

"We will take the lead."

The ninja and the English princess moved out front.

Having a ninja lead the way was indeed the right thing to do. So Narumi and the half-dragon fell back while the ninja, English princess, and the Musashi Chancellor's knight took the lead.

The Musashi Chancellor, princess, and shrine maiden were in the center. So if Narumi and the half-dragon were in the back...

...Yes.

This was their current “formation”.

Even without the Vice Chancellor and the other Special Duty Officers, they could reach the depths of these ruins with this formation.

“Musashi really is powerful.”

“We are not powerful,” said the half-dragon. “We are merely a collection of eccentric idiots.”

“True,” she agreed while wondering if she was one of those “eccentric idiots”.

She did not dislike the idea.

While taking the lead, the ninja suddenly raised his hand.

“The passageway is opening up!”

“Judge,” replied the others as they hurried forward.

When they saw light up ahead, they picked up the pace, but Narumi noticed something.

“This is...”

She realized what that light was.

“...sunlight, isn’t it?”

Pushed on by Narumi’s voice, Tenzou reached that spot and gasped.

There was a giant crater before his eyes.

Its surface was covered by a forest, but the depression had a diameter of approximately three kilometers. The earth had been torn up in a giant hemisphere.

Some kind of massive destruction had gouged into this region.

But, he thought. The surrounding crust has crumbled inside.

In that case, the original hole may have only been about one kilometer, he corrected himself based on a hasty estimation. Mary then spoke up as she

viewed their surroundings next to him.

“The crust was tuned by a fairly powerful spell. And...quite recently.”

“Recently?”

“Oh, uh, I mean recently in terms of the earth’s crust...”

Mary reached a hand into the air around her and drew in the lights of small spirits from within the trees which had grown taller than them.

“...I would guess it was about 30 years ago.”

“So around that time...”

Mitotsudaira started to say something behind them, but fell silent.

Tenzou knew why. Due to the trees and other plants and due to the collapse of the surrounding land, the area looked like a valley or a vast depression.

But they had once seen the creation of a similar land structure.

“Is this the result of a ley line reactor explosion...?”

No one could answer his question. However...

“Oh, you’ve arrived, have you?”

They must have regained their connection to the outside world because a divine transmission reached them.

It was from Sakai.

Mitotsudaira listened to Sakai’s voice while she exchanged a glance with Mary.

“You all should take a look around that depression.”

Mitotsudaira did so. And something was rising from the collapsed edge of the vast depression.

...Mist?

Something like a thin mist was rising into the air. It seemed too clearly formed to be the shimmering of heat from a geothermal source, but Asama seemed to

know what it was.

“That is a barrier, isn’t it? And a stealth one at that.”

“That’s right. Ever since 30 years ago, you haven’t been able to tell where it is from above even if you know you have to be quite close by. That’s why you had to go in through the ruins. ...You couldn’t use divine transmissions inside there before, but that might be due to how close the ruins are to collapsing. If things look dangerous, get on out of there, okay?”

“Judge,” replied Mitotsudaira with her eyebrows raised. At the bottom of the collapse, the 1st Special Duty Officer had found the floor.

“Principal Sakai. ...Did there used to be a small facility at the end of the passageway?”

“Oh? Is it still there?”

It was. There was a slanted structure at the bottom of the collapse. Instead of being caught in whatever had caused the depression, it must have simply slid down when the surrounding crust collapsed.

“That’s probably Nobuyasu-san’s lab. That’s your destination.”

Chapter 59: Leader in a Gloomy Corridor

第五十九章

『陰影通路の先行人』

一つ目の不理解は
二つ目の謎に気づかせ
三つ目の手がかりを寄越す
配点 (手応え)



The first oddity

Leads you to notice the second mystery

And provides the third clue

Point Allocation (Feedback)

Nobuyasu's lab.

Masazumi was on her way to the location where he had committed suicide and that Sakai had destroyed fifteen years before.

After descending the gravel slope of the collapse, the previous corridor continued through the rubble.

The facility had fallen and broken. The rain had gotten into its slanted interior, but...

"It looks like the ruins' preservation divine protection just barely reached it," said Mary.

Sure enough, the ivy and moss disappeared once they got inside. The air conditioning was somewhat in effect, so the air was warm and circulated. However, there was no light.

...And it doesn't have any windows since it was always an underground facility.

The door at the end of the corridor was already open. It seemed to have had a sign, but that had been removed.

Just to be safe, Crossunite kept close to the slanted wall and peeked inside.

After a moment, the idiot walked up behind him, and...

"Urah!!"

...shoved Crossunite inside.

"Nwoh!" shouted the ninja as he staggered a few steps inside and quickly dashed back out.

"Wh-what do you think you're doing!?"

“Hey, now. Calm down, Tenzou. I was just trying to make things more exciting.”

Horizon kicked the idiot toward the entrance.

The idiot, who had become a nudist again at some point, spun through the air and fell into the darkness beyond.

“Ahh~”

Narumi moved her chin to count the seconds as his voice echoed back up at them. On the third movement, Masazumi heard something crashing into wood as well as another sound she recognized quite well.

“...Books.”

She was telling the others that this was the sound of books falling from a shelf, but Horizon nodded and placed a hand on her shoulder.

“I know you want some entertainment, but this really is not the time.”

“That’s not what I meant!!”

But before she could say anything more, a voice reached them.

The nudist’s voice came from the darkness beyond the door.

“Heyyy, c’mon in here. ...There’s a bunch of weird things in here.”

“So it’s finally happening.”

Sakai stood from his seat and turned his back on the clearing lined with wood cabins.

“ ‘Musashi’-san, I’m going to go meet them. Want to join me?”

“I have little choice in the matter as I am being relayed via sign frame. Over.”

“It’s the feeling of the thing,” said Sakai as he looked up into the sky. “Here they come.”

A few silhouettes flew in the sky. They were Celestial Dragons and Terrestrial Dragons from various parts of the world.

They flew gently across a wide area of the sky, but not one of them could be

heard roaring.

“That is a dragon funerary ritual. They decorate the sky silently so as not to intrude on the final roar of their dying fellow dragon. We are observing this, but just how influential a Celestial Dragon was this friend of yours, Sakai-sama? Over.”

“He threw out his influence,” said Sakai as he started walking.

The sign frame was set to follow him, so he made his way toward the ruins with “Musashi” by his side. And...

“Nobuyasu-san, Lord-sensei, Da-chan, the others, and I weren’t that kind of person.”

Asama saw the place known as Nobuyasu’s lab.

It was a large room with all four walls covered with bookcases. The large space sloped downwards toward the back.

She had passed it by, but there was a confidential room at the entrance and something like classrooms or waiting rooms on the left and right.

Those left and right rooms had been destroyed, though. She did not know if that had happened in the collapse or when Sakai demolished everything, but there was no way of investigating it now.

However, she illuminated the center of the room with a lamp spell and found something odd around the center: foundations.

The metal foundations were made to receive ether from the floor in order to accomplish something. They were about a meter across and they had sixteen torii-style tuning devices, but...

“What are these...?”

The plugs on the foundations were shaped for receiving power.

Asama could not quite figure out if she had ever seen anything like this before or not.

She searched her memories for something and some similar devices came to

mind. They resembled the base of an acceleration thruster and also the base of the towing belts. The base of a portable fuel tank was also similar. The size was different, but the plug for a bundle of light-emitting spells used in lamps was also similar.

“Hmm...”

Too much knowledge can be a problem too, she realized as she stopped thinking on it.

Mal-Ga: “Should we carry Naomasa there?”

Smoking Girl: “That sounds like a pain. Just bring back the data.”

...Yes, it probably would be fastest to record everything and have Masa look at it...

Tenzou and Adele were already working to take apart a portion of one. They were both skilled with mechanical things. Deciding they could handle it better than her, Asama approached them.

“Adele, Tenzou-kun, if you can examine them, then check out the top ones too.”

“Eh? Top ones?”

Adele looked up at her, so Asama nodded and looked overhead.

There were more foundations on the ceiling about five meters above.

Something would have been held between the upper and lower foundations.

Adele looked up at them.

“Now that’s what I call big...”

“Yes, if they were fuel tanks, they would have been big enough for a large transport ship.”

“No, I was saying your boobs are, um, in the way...”

Everyone looked over at her, so Asama took a step out of the way so Adele could see overhead.

Across the room, Horizon held her hands near her breasts and massaged the

air.

“No,” said the nudist next to her. “They’re more like this.”

He showed a corrected size in front of his own chest, but Asama did not even care anymore.

But if these were fuel tanks, they really would have been large. Three 1m tanks would be enough to hold a festival on the Musashi. And these were five times that size.

“Heh heh. Eight of them?” asked Kimi. “What were they doing with so many?”

“That’s a good question,” replied Asama as she looked up again.

She compared the ones on the ceiling with the ones on the floor.

“Huh...? What does this mean? The ones down here are held in place by toriis...but look.” She pointed at them with her light. “The ones up there are supported by sixteen cross-style tuning devices. Does that mean this is combined Catholic and Shinto technology?”

“There are other oddities,” said Tenzou as he inspected one of the foundations. “I’ve managed to dismantle a few of the components and take a look, but they are generally Mikawa products. There are also a few from IZUMO. But among them...there are some that are definitely from Tres España.”

“You mean...?”

Tenzou handed her a component. It was contained in a rectangular cross-shaped mold.

Asama thought as she viewed what seemed to be a switch for controlling the conduction of ether. Was there anything that connected this place to Tres España?

...There is.

“Could this be connected to Shimabara? ...The Shimabara Rebellion was started by a Catholic force, after all.”

Gold Mar: “Then what were they doing there?”

Naito’s question was only natural, but none of them could answer it.

Asama was Musashi's Shinto Representative, but even she had difficulty figuring out what they had been doing here.

"It would really depend on what was held between these eight foundations..."

"Eight?" someone asked.

It was Mary. She stood in the center of the room with light spirits illuminating her body. She held up that light with a hand and looked down at her feet.

"Look here..."

Asama saw what had led to Mary's question.

"It appears something similar to those foundations was removed."

"So there were nine in all?"

Masazumi looked back while having Tsukinowa analyze the contents of the bookcases covering the walls.

She thought about the relative positions of the eight foundations and Mary in the center.

"Was something extracted into the center from the eight foundations?"

"Good idea." Kimi put a hand on her chin and paused in thought for a few seconds. "This must have been a Satomi body modification agency. By gathering the eight dog virtues and combining them into a single doggy, they could create boobs with the perfect ratio and size. But this place was destroyed before Yoshy learned of its existence, so she will be stuck with a flat chest forever. No luck for you either, Masazumi. Such a shame...!"

"How are we supposed to react when she isn't even here?"

"Good point." Kimi put a hand on her chin and paused in thought for a few seconds. "This must have been Asama's secret beauty salon. By completing the eight courses and then completing the final course, she could create boobs with the perfect ratio and size. It was thanks to visiting here seven times that Asama can obstruct someone's view, but this place was destroyed, so Masazumi will be stuck with a flat chest forever..."

“She’s right here!”

“Yes, I am! Ohh, why did I think I should take her seriously!?”

Masazumi could not agree more, so she sighed.

...Principal Sakai was right.

She did not understand at all. Or should she say she now understood what it was she did not understand? But...

“I think we can assume this is the place we heard about in Novgorod. ...This is the academy where skilled people gathered for a two-year period 30 years ago.”

“Um, Masazumi.”

She turned toward Asama’s voice and saw Asama holding up a component.

“I suggested the same thing earlier, but I don’t think this is that academy. ...Or rather, um, this facility with the foundations in it is not that academy.”

“Why not?”

“Well,” started Asama as she lowered her eyebrows and raised her hand toward the light Mary held.

She held a component between her fingers.

“I just did a search for similar products, but this is an ether controller made by C.A.S., the Catholic cooperative brand belonging to Tres España’s San Mercado. ...When I did a search on that, it turns out it’s no longer for sale and it was only sold from 10 years ago to 25 years ago.”

Which meant...

“This place did not exist 30 years ago. ...I don’t know what was here then, but what we see here definitely was not the academy from 30 years ago.”

Asama spoke to Masazumi and the others as she recalled their discussion last night.

When they had spoken in the dark night and made some guesses about 30

years ago, something about their information had not seemed to fit together.

They had wondered if they were mistaken about something.

They had all realized that, but they had not known where their mistake was.

So they had decided they would figure it out once they came here.

...And we certainly did.

This was why things had not fit together the night before.

Asama opened her notes from last night in a sign frame. And...

“We heard that, for a two-year period 30 years ago, Lord Motonobu gathered skilled people from various nations in an academy that was everywhere and yet nowhere. ...And we heard that this place was under Lord Motonobu’s management until 30 years go.”

That was why she had wondered if this was that academy.

But something had not fit.

...That happened 30 years ago. But...

“This place was handed over to Lord Nobuyasu 30 years ago.”

When she said that, someone said “ah”.

It was Suzu. She had been listening to the outside noises from the entrance.

“That doesn’t...fit...”

“No, it doesn’t, Suzu-san. If people were gathered here 30 years ago and it continued for two years, the academy would have existed until 28 years ago. But this became Lord Nobuyasu’s possession 30 years ago.”

Asama faced the site of the collapse out front. She could not actually see outside from here, but...

“30 years ago, Lord Motonobu was trying to accomplish something here with the Shimabara survivors in those ruins, but I think maybe most of that research equipment was destroyed by the ley line reactor. After that, he probably left this place to Lord Nobuyasu...”

Asama was fairly certain her guesses here were correct.

“And then he created that two-year academy in some other place.”

Masazumi stopped inspecting the bookcases when she heard what Asama said.

Tsukinowa tilted his head, but Masazumi simply asked her question.

“...If so, what is this place?”

She asked with her back turned and received silence in response.

The area she was in was dimly lit. She was by the wall of the large room, so the lights held by Mary and Asama had trouble reaching her.

She then asked another question.

“Why did Principal Sakai send us here?”

“Well,” started Balfette before trailing off.

They did not know. No, if they were to describe it simply...

“You could call this Lord Nobuyasu’s personal research facility.”

There were eight foundations and signs of another foundation in the center. But...

“This might have been used for a hobby or some kind of personal research...”

“Heh heh. Are you saying he was making a porn game or something?”

Novice: “Could you stop that? Lord Nobuyasu committed suicide after his actions were criticized by the Oda clan, but it would make reality far too cruel if those ‘actions’ were creating a porn game.”

Mal-Ga: “You must commit *seppuku* for selling copies you forgot to censor...! I could see it happening back then.”

Unfortunately, that really was plausible.

“Oh.”

Masazumi spotted a porn game package hidden behind some books on a bookcase.

...Wait.

Masazumi restrained herself.

That porn game was probably vintage, but she had a bad feeling about what this implied about reality.

...Th-that wasn't really it, was it!? This isn't why he committed seppuku, is it!?

Calm down, Honda Masazumi. Think about the timeline. A leaked uncensored game wouldn't be hidden back here. This must be from before that. Probably. Yes, that has to be it.

But for peace of mind and to be absolutely certain, she had Tsukinowa surreptitiously activate a lamp spell.

“Maa.”

The light revealed the title to be A Frigid Fool^[3]. That was a porn game from the Muromachi period. *Good, it's vintage. There's no doubting it now. I can rule this one safe.*

...That was a close one!

Masazumi returned the book to hide the game.

But after breathing a sigh of relief, she calmed down and reality came rushing back.

...That doesn't change the fact that Lord Nobuyasu had a porn game here!

Or is that normal for a teenage boy...?

“...”

She thought about it, but she settled on everyone being different. Everyone was allowed their privacy. There was no point in looking into it and she would only be dishonoring the individual. But the animal ears still seemed a bit much. So was it okay or not?

Regardless, she heard a sudden voice from behind.

“Hey, Seijun.”

“What is it, idiot?”

“Hey...don’t call me that. I’m a nudist right now. Make sure you look at me before you call me names.”

Masazumi faced the nudist, smiled, and pointed her right thumb straight down.

“Goodbye, nudist. I’m busy right now.”

“D-damn you! ...Actually, wait. What kind of facility were you hoping this was? Could you tell me real quick?”

“Well, uh,” mumbled Masazumi. “I was kind of hoping this was connected to the Genesis Project that Lord Motonobu mentioned or connected to the Princess Disappearances.”

Masazumi realized everyone reacted in the same way: with silence.

They were all looking at her without saying a word.

...Huh?

“U-umm?”

She looked back at them all. Suzu alone did not seem to know what was going on, but Horizon walked over to her and whispered in her ear.

“Oh, o-okay I get it now.”

...Get what!?

Horizon then stood in the center of them all. She lightly raised both hands, counted down from three, and shouted in unison with the others.

“To the left!”

“Huh?”

Masazumi turned toward the bookcase behind her and saw a symbol there.

She had been planning to inspect that bookcase next, so Tsukinowa had illuminated it in advance.

“The Double Border Crest...!?”

That was not all. There was text written alongside it.

“I won’t leave you...”

Chapter 60: Reunited Ones in a Place of Passing

第六十章

『通り過ぎ場の再会人』



いつか解る事が目の前にある今
触れようと思えたかどうか
配点 (恐れなく)

When something you will eventually understand was right in front of you Did you think to touch it or not?

Point Allocation (Without Fear)

When they discovered the Double Border Crest, Asama quickly checked on everyone's defensive divine protections. However...

...None of them have activated.

Mary's, Masazumi's, and Horizon's had not reacted like they had in Novgorod. After confirming that, she looked up once more.

Masazumi slowly backed away from the bookcase where a two-meter symbol was drawn in black across both the books and the case. It was...

"An incomplete lewd mark!"^[4]

"No."

"Don't be silly!" insisted Kimi. "Someone started to draw it nice and big, but then they just added the one horizontal line, told everyone to imagine the rest, and fled, leaving it to future generations to complete it!"

"What possibly reason would someone have to do that?"

"You really are silly! Don't knock it until you've tried drawing one yourself! I'll draw one on the Asama Shrine sometime, so look forward to that! And listen! You can help out with a smile! Smiling lewd!!"

"Are you trying to turn us into a heretical shrine, Kimi?"

Only then did Asama realize something about this Double Border Crest.

"This wasn't made just now, was it? There's no ether reading."

A closer look showed the crest and writing were in ink. There was even a chalk outline and a preservation charm attached. Also a nametag reading "Nobuyasu".

Masazumi frowned when she saw that.

"Was this Lord Nobuyasu's 'suicide'?"

“Whoever arrived here after his ‘suicide’ must have recreated and preserved the scene.”

That would have been Principal Sakai, silently agreed Asama, but if there had been a Double Border Crest here...

“Judge. I understand perfectly.” Horizon nodded, looked to the others, and clenched her right fist. “It was Lord Nobuyasu’s ghost that has been drawing these lewd marks. When he committed suicide here, he attempted to draw the lewd mark while committing *seppuku*, but someone showed up and he died before completing it. Ever since, his ghost has been wandering the Far East attempting to draw the lewd mark. ‘A ciiiircle....a horizontal liiiine...ohhh, someone showed up...curse yooooou...’ And so he ends up using his ghost powers on whoever interrupted him.”

Kimi collapsed onto her side, but Asama decided it would be safer to wait until later to rouse her.

Asama then spoke to Horizon.

“A weird ghost like that doesn’t exist.”

“But if we let him fully draw it just once, his regrets will vanish and he might be able to rest in peace.”

Maybe so, she thought, but at the same time...

“We’ve taken a step forward on this mystery, but I feel like we only have more questions now. I mean, we had no idea Lord Nobuyasu fell victim to the Double Border Crest and the Princess Disappearances.”

“That’s right,” said a sign frame.

It was a divine transmission from Neshinbara.

Novice: “The one thing we’ve really learned here is that the Princess Disappearances might be connected to Shimabara...or rather, the Catholics. Of course, it probably also uses Shinto tech, but I think Shimabara is the keyword. And I bet the Shimabara survivors and Lord Motonobu met up there.”

Silver Wolf: “If so, what was Lord Nobuyasu doing here after he was given the place?”

Flat Vassal: “And what did ‘I won’t leave you’ mean?”

“Well...” trailed off Neshinbara.

That was when Toori looked up at the ceiling.

“Horizon’s dad was trying to become friends with whatever the Princess is, right? ...And separately, her uncle was doing a bunch of stuff here and was taken away by the Princess,” he said. “Then wouldn’t he have been doing stuff related to the Princess and the Apocalypse separate from Horizon’s dad? ...So our next task will be to record what kind of place this was and investigate that data while following in her dad’s footsteps. Isn’t that right?”

When he put it like that, it was simple.

That would lead to what had been done here and the Shimabara connection. If those things would act as distractions that kept them from starting, he was telling them to get moving even if they could not see where they were headed.

Tenzou, Narumi, and the others stated their agreement or nodded and Asama smiled a little when she saw those reactions.

...Honestly.

Everyone had nearly come to a stop after sensing a mystery here, but he had summed it up so simply.

He’s always such an idiot, but he really is our king, she thought.

Then Tenzou and Adele raised their hands. Tenzou displayed a diagram of the room on a sign frame.

“Judge, we have a decent picture of the place now. This place is probably missing a lot, but we still need to investigate what it was for.”

Meanwhile, some dust fell from the ceiling.

“We should probably hurry. This land has already collapsed. And the Celestial Dragons most likely intend to destroy these ruins. I am concerned about Futayo-dono and Gin-dono’s battle, so we should hurry back to-...”

He trailed off and Suzu gave a shout in his place.

“Just...hurry...!”

Asama gasped and looked up.

They had heard distant tremors this entire time, but an especially loud rumble shook everything now.

The white dragon had roared back in the main ruins.

And that dragon cry was answered by a creaking in the floor. A tilt slowly propagated below their feet.

“We must hurry!”

Tenzou took Mary’s hand and took the lead toward the entrance.

Horizon was still viewing the Double Border Crest with interest, but Asama grabbed and pulled on her hand.

“Kimi! Kimi! Enough fainting! Please just get uuuup!!”

Futayo was racing.

Each time they fought and attacked, more of the ceiling fell and the floor shifted and burst upwards.

The ruins had already been tilted toward the collapsed hole, but thanks to the battles with the two Celestial Dragons, the foundation’s lifespan was shrinking fast and everything was prepared to crumble away.

The battlefield may have been falling apart, but...

“That is no reason to end this battle!”

“Indeed. A reason to fight is all that is needed to create a battlefield...!”

The dragon no longer hesitated to use his six wings. He raced forward with his multi-stage acceleration to pursue them at full power and take up the most advantageous position.

But the two girls were holding their own. Even now, they were pursuing the white dragon who had taken the lead and put some distance between them. Based on the previous pattern, Sasuke would make a high-speed turn and fire a dragon cannon on them. They wanted to catch up before that and move in close while he fired the dragon cannon. So...

“Gin-dono...!”

“Judge,” replied Gin as she moved out ahead.

Her Racing Words was effective for pursuing the running dragon.

With a tremor, the dirt floor swelled up from the collapse of the stone floor below. It formed piles and cracks, but...

“...!”

Gin ran with her hips low. Her body was moving forward, but her center of gravity was low and she read the changes to the floor as she went. Her style was to maintain her balance so she could enter an attack stance at a moment’s notice.

Futayo would sometimes spin her spear vertically, but she tended to hold it at waist height while running. That may have been part of the reason her sense of balance was so rough. So when she saw someone with a controlled stance like Gin’s...

“You are so cool, Gin-dono...!”

“Don’t say things like that in the middle of battle! Now hold out your hand!”

She scolded me again.

But Gin was kind. If Futayo held out her hand, she would grab it. And...

“Here we go...!”

Racing Words brought Futayo right up to the white dragon.

Gin’s task was to pass her speed to Futayo.

Once Racing Words had enough momentum to catch up to the dragon, she left that with Futayo’s Soaring Wings. Gin knew Futayo would manage somehow from there, but...

...She is so dumb.

Futayo did not let go of her hand. Gin first thought she was so focused on the battle that her hand had tensed up, but that was not the case. She was simply

squeezing Gin's hand back.

As if to say it was only natural for them to fight as a pair.

Gin had no choice but to use Racing Words to catch up to and run alongside her.

They had to win this like that.

And to do so, Futayo needed a safe head-on path so she could send out her cutting power.

Their enemy would not allow that. The dragon already knew that cutting power could hit. If they took that head-on path, he would either fire his dragon cannon or move to crush them. So...

"I will take up a useful position. ...There will not be time to switch places, so please follow me."

With that, Gin retrieved the speed she had passed to Futayo.

Hand in hand, she used Racing Words to pursue the dragon's movements.

The white took the lead and the red pursued.

When the white made a forceful turn, the blue made a short turn along the inner angle.

The blue took the red's hand and the red took the blue's hand.

They sometimes let go and sometimes switched out hands, but they never moved apart.

Their hands would part, but they themselves would not. And yet the two girls never looked to each other. They both kept their eyes squarely on the white dragon running out ahead of them and they reached their hands into empty space.

Those hands grabbed each other.

One was a giant prosthetic hand and the other a slender flesh-and-blood hand. The size and weight were mismatched, but they formed a perfect bond and became the center of the girls' acceleration and attacks.

When the red fired, the white swung his body and leaped left and right.

When the white fired, the blue would dodge it with a forward burst of speed.

And once they were close to the white again, the red moved forward and accelerated.

The red and blue frequently swapped between left and right, circled around the hall as they went, were pulled toward the dragon who cut across the hall, and drew out something like a compass diagram on the circular stage.

They circled around and around.

The three of them pursued each other while drawing endlessly varying arcs and using acceleration and stretching motions similar to gliding.

The ceiling fell and the floor jutted up, but those were merely decorations for the compass diagram.

“Ohh...!”

“————!”

Their voices and roars never ceased as they ran.

With the white in the lead, the three accelerators raced along the longest line of the circular diagram.

Sasuke watched the enemy's movements.

The red girl pursued him and the blue girl charged forward from there.

They both used different types of acceleration, but their goal of bringing him down was the same.

They had seemed on such bad terms, but they had finally achieved complete coordination.

...That's right.

The humans who had faced the dragons in the past had been like this.

800 years ago, 400 years ago, and now, the human race was always clasping their hands together.

That was something the dragons could not do.

They might gather together, but they were always solitary. Because their individual powers were too great, it was easier for them to act independently.

Battles between humans and dragons always came down to this.

The enemy was keeping up with his high-speed turns.

He was drawing a line over the full diameter of the hall to put some distance between them. Then he would turn around and fire a dragon cannon. But those two were almost literally right on his tail.

Because they were using his speed, that speed did not give him an advantage. If he did not attack or take some action to shake them from his tail, they would simply hunt him from behind.

In that case, he thought.

To test them, he raced toward the wall as if to run right into it.

He did not turn or lower his speed. And he had only one thing to say.

“How about this...!?”

Gin pursued the white dragon. She cast Racing Words several times, along with...

...Cooling spells!

She was terribly exhausted. She had cast reduction spells and strengthening spells, but she was exhausted from before as well. Her sweat was simply torn away by her speed, so she could not take that loss of moisture lightly.

However...

“I will pursue him!”

She was in the support role. She had to pull Futayo along and allow her to reach the enemy.

So she did not think anything of it when she saw the enemy charging toward the wall. She did not question it even when she knew they were going to crash into the wall like this.

She was the daughter of a warrior family.

During combat and during battle, she was prepared for whatever might happen.

...Musashi Vice Chancellor!

She continued forward to leave this in that girl's hands.

She only had to pursue the dragon with all her might and pull Futayo along with her.

And the racing dragon took action in front of her.

When his nose was less than 30cm from the wall, he turned to the right.

His tail was raised and he swung it around while twisting his body to the right.

Gin and Futayo took the left course. The tail would probably fly after them, but this was safer than continuing forward on the dragon's guidance.

...We need to force ourselves directly across from him...!

But the tail arrived. It descended from the air behind them on the right as if to strike them.

That swing increased his turning speed. The high-speed attack would also sweep them out of the way. Gin could tell it was aimed between them and the wall.

There was a way to dodge it: deactivate Racing Words and flee backwards.

But then they would lose their chance to strike the enemy and the dragon could target them after turning.

So, thought Gin. It all comes down to this.

She moved in.

She did not reduce her speed at all as he ran into the 30cm valley created between the wall and the dragon.

Gin forcibly charged in from outside and performed an accelerated slide that was much like drifting.

She had used a rapid series of Racing Words.

She had repeatedly locked the spell onto her hips, stomach, and shoulders to avoid the tail and pursue the dragon's turn. She soared many times over as she forcibly moved forward.

She turned to lead with her left shoulder and her right hand held Futayo's left hand.

She did not let go. If she did, they would lose any chance of standing before this dragon again. That was how close they had come and how quickly they were pursuing.

...We can do this!

The dragon raised his tail. He swung it upwards while making sure it did not hit the wall. He likely intended to use it for a two-stage acceleration forward. So...

"..."

Gin fully activated her strengthening and cooling spells.

She used up almost every spell she possessed. Ether light shards washed over her body and she felt like her blood had cooled, but she definitely moved...

...Forward!

She passed by the wall before the dragon could perform his two-stage acceleration.

A moment later, the dragon took a sudden action. As he turned, he swung his hip toward the inner angle.

It was a simple matter. Since they were moving around him on the outer angle, he was preparing to slam his body against them and the wall. And...

...Is this...!?

"...!!"

It was a direct hit.

Sasuke heard the destruction of metal and felt the impact in his side.

He might have thought he had crushed one of the enemies, but...

...I did not!

After his side hit the wall, he pushed off of it with his great strength to complete his turn.

And there he saw a sign of the enemy.

There were definitely two crushed forms embedded in the wall.

They were the red girl's left prosthetic arm and her large cannon.

It was the arm that he had crushed and the cannon that had pierced the wall. The enemy had used that destruction and piercing to escape his attack. So where had the enemy gone? He instantly swung his head left and right.

"Behind me...!?"

The front was not the only way to directly face him.

They could attack his central line from behind as well.

After escaping his crushing attack with their high-speed run, the blue girl had used her acceleration to run along the wall and move out behind him.

He understood why the red girl had bothered to let him crush her arm and cannon. She had known he would turn his entire body to look if he felt that tactile feedback.

From there, they just had to circle opposite the arm and cannon to directly face his central line from behind.

"...Kh!"

Sasuke tried to turn around. He tried to raise his body and turn so the enemy behind him could not attack his central line.

A shell flew toward him.

It came from dead ahead. The cannon stabbing into the wall had fired on him.

It targeted his throat.

...What...!?

The red girl, Tachibana Gin, had not simply escaped or sacrificed her body. She had pulled the blue girl along while aiming for the weak point below his throat.

Gin's body shook as she braked after circling to the opposite position.

She was definitely at her limit now. As soon as her speed dropped, sweat poured from her body.

"...Kah!"

A scorching breath escaped her lungs. But this was enough. If the dragon raised his head in preparation to turn, she would target his throat. If he lowered his head instead, she would fire on the cut on his forehead.

And once that impact stopped him, Honda Futayo could fire her cut in safety.

The dragon had just raised his head. That meant firing on his throat.

It was sure to hit.

And it did. The sound of impact rang out and the dragon's throat armor was destroyed.

Honda Futayo began to move forward.

But the dragon moved. And in a way they had never seen before.

...Huh?

The dragon leaned his head back using the impact to his throat.

...Is that...?

"Honda Futayo! Fall back!" shouted Gin. "The white dragon is performing a backflip!!"

The white dragon raised his entire body in a backflip.

This required all of his great strength.

And it produced a great rumble that was sure to speed up the destruction of

the crumbling hall.

“Oh...!”

His tail moved between his legs and shot forward as his entire body flipped through the air.

A white ring appeared in the crumbling space.

A moment later, Sasuke released a midair dragon cannon from his back and fired it on the Musashi Vice Chancellor.

She responded by raising her spear.

She intended to break the beam of light.

That was likely possible.

She raised the spear tip to pierce the center of the dragon cannon with an instantaneous movement.

But that was not enough. After all, she was by the wall.

Thus, he had not been targeting her.

The dirt floor and wall that were pierced by the shattered dragon cannon were his true target.

It was not a direct hit, but the split and destroyed dragon cannon reflected off of the wall and floor. And immediately afterwards, something occurred right next to her.

“An explosion of the scattered dragon cannon...!”

The Musashi Vice Chancellor and her supporter were swallowed up by an attack much like the dragon cannon released from his entire body.

Sasuke landed. He twisted his body around and planted his four legs on the ground so he was facing his opponent.

He was in the center of the hall and he looked forward to see the final destruction he had wrought.

The wall was destroyed and the air was filled with dust and light fragments.

More than wind, it was a wavering of the air that joined the destruction which scattered everywhere like a blizzard.

And he spoke.

“Well done.”

He understood. The dragon knew all too well what it meant that his enemy was not in that scene of destruction.

So where were the Musashi Vice Chancellor and Tachibana Gin?

“Above me?”

He saw a blue figure and a red figure in the air above him. They were quite high up. As high as he had reached during his backflip.

The enemy had dodged his attack. They had used the fragments of the floor and wall created when the explosion reflected off of them.

...They used their acceleration spells to kick up off of them...!

Futayo felt an axis of movement in her feet.

She kicked off the fragments to move through the air.

This was the technique Muneshige had shown her when Houjou attacked. She had tried to mimic him, but...

...This is difficult!

Stepping through the fragments would be far too easy. In fact, she had done so several times, but Gin had pulled on her hand each time and brought out an Arcabuz Cruz to act as a foothold.

“Honestly,” muttered Futayo. “I can never thank you enough, Gin-dono.”

“There is no need to say anything.”

I made her mad again.

But Futayo could see the enemy dead ahead. She saw his center line, but not from the front or the back.

From above. And...

“Honda Futayo...moving in!”

The dragon no longer moved his legs as he gathered strength in his body.

He was going to release his dragon cannon from his full body as she fell.

She had no intention of letting it hit her. So...

“Here we go.”

“Eh?” said Gin, but Futayo was unsure why.

Futayo moved in while pulling on Gin’s hand. She now stepped on the bottom side of their previous footholds.

She used her acceleration to race straight down.

Soaring Wings’s speed sent them down far faster than in freefall.

Futayo sensed light.

It was a destructive power. The dragon’s breath.

But she saw her target just before that light reached its peak.

There was a crack in the white dragon’s back. That was...

...The sign that my father overcame this dragon.

She set her sights on that. And Gin forcibly let go of her hand.

“ ... ”

The girl silently pushed on Futayo’s back, wordlessly telling her to accelerate forward and down.

And Futayo raised Tonbo Spare while narrowing her eyes at the intensity of the coming light.

“Bind...!”

It was time to overcome that sign left by the Peerless in the East.

“Tonbo Spare!”

The light burst and all of it was instantly blasted from the hall.

Everything grew clear and only three things remained.

One was a dragon with his back shattered and the other two were girls facing him from a short distance.

The girls had both fallen to their knees as if expressing their thanks for the standing dragon.

But the corners of the dragon's mouth were raised.

He was smiling.

And he turned his injured forehead to view his back.

A moment later, an immense amount of ether light sprayed from his back.

The light danced through the cleared hall, but the dragon did not fall.

"Well done."

He smiled as he spoke to the girls who stood up once more.

"I hope you manage to overcome the past and all else that stands in your way...!"

Chapter 61: Bearers in a Place of Parting

第六十一章

『別れ場の担い手達』



I will say goodbye

In a way that leaves no regrets

Point Allocation (Promise)

The destruction of the ruins continued.

Mitotsudaira heard the passageway collapse and cave in behind them.

And when she arrived in the hall they had left earlier...

“Futayo, Gin...”

She wanted to tell them to hurry outside, but the words would not come.

The dragon they had been facing stood in the center of the hall and she saw its giant body vanishing into the light.

She looked to everyone catching up behind her, to the two girls who looked back her way, and to the dragon.

“...It’s over, isn’t it?”

That was all she could say here. Not only was the dragon badly injured, but Futayo and Gin’s exhaustion and overall condition were far worse than when she had seen them before. However...

...They got what they needed here.

Everything remained motionless. It was the same as when Mitotsudaira had fought her mother or Rudolf II.

She could tell these people had reached some kind of conclusion.

And she saw the dragon and the two girls exchange a slow nod.

It’s over, she thought. And it’s time to get out of here.

But just then, the ground clearly tilted below her feet.

“...We need to hurry! This hall is going to cave in just like that passageway!”

There was no point in questioning Tenzou’s assertion. The passageway behind them had collapsed while they hurried down it.

The ruins continued to fall apart, but it was more than just damage. Most of the things around them were being irreparably destroyed and rendered unrecognizable.

But as they hurried across the hall to regroup with Futayo and Gin, Asama suddenly looked overhead. She was worried about the fragments falling from above, but...

“...Look, everyone...!”

Asama stepped forward and pointed to the hall’s ceiling.

That stone dome was covered in ivy and eroded. It was all about to fall apart, but the tremors and destruction had shaken free everything covering its surface.

Mitotsudaira looked to see what was above them all. And she saw what was there.

“The same diagram as in Novgorod...!?”

The rumbling and the tilting of the floor would not stop.

But Mitotsudaira realized there was a definite shape on the crumbling ceiling.

The eight images based on the Age of Dawn surrounded the ceiling and another image was carved into the center.

People stood hand-in-hand in a ring around the edge of that central circle.

It looked like they were celebrating something, but when she looked up above their heads....

“Here too...!?”

Whatever should have been in the center had been carved away.

“That’s right,” said the dragon. “It has been like this for a very long time. I have heard the similar images around the Far East are the same with but one exception.”

“One exception?” asked Horizon. “Just out of curiosity, where is that?”

“I only said I had heard that, did I not, Musashi princess?”

“Then...who did you hear that from?”

“Houjou Tokiyori.”

Mitotsudaira gasped when she heard that name.

“The leader of the Testament Cross-Borders Unit from 400 years ago...?”

“Indeed.” The dragon nodded as destroyed fragments occasionally fell on him. “When we fled here, a messenger from Houjou arrived. They brought a posthumous note from Tokiyori and they told us we were free to use what we found in the ruins. Also...”

Also...

“According to that note, ‘if you are curious about the overhead relief, come visit Houjou. If Houjou still exists, you will be most welcome and we can discuss that relief as we have the one place in the world where its full form still exists.’ ...Of course, we had given up on the world, so we preferred a quiet life with the people here instead of being welcomed into Houjou.”

“That settles it,” immediately replied Masazumi.

Mitotsudaira nodded as well. She was aware of the strength in her gaze as she turned toward Masazumi.

“We’re going to war with Houjou next, aren’t we?”

“...I don’t like the way you phrased that, but that will likely be the end result.”

Almost Everyone: “She won’t come out and say it, but she won’t deny it either...!”

Me: “I mean, if she just came out and said it, wouldn’t that make her a pretty dangerous person?”

Vice President: “Oh, c’mon! If I did deny it, you’d just make jokes about it!!”

Masazumi was disheartened, but she bowed lightly toward the dragon.

“That was some important information. You have our thanks.”

“You will be going to Houjou then? ...If so, pursue this. I assume you already

know that the people who left this place 30 years ago created a nonexistent academy with Motonobu as their leader.”

When Mitotsudaira confirmed it with a “judge”, the white dragon smiled while his body continued to vanish into scattered ether light.

He then looked and spoke to her.

“The ruins are collapsing. I will open the way to the top. But first...Musashi princess.”

“...Yes.”

Horizon took a step forward and nodded.

In response, the dragon repeated the question that must have reached his dragon ears.

“When is the right time for you to live and to die, hm?”

That was exactly Horizon’s next question.

Horizon nodded.

There was something she had been wondering about for a long time.

She had wondered it after Mikatagahara, on the way to Novgorod, and at Novgorod.

“Everything is eventually lost.”

Nothing was never lost. So...

“Even if you try to prevent loss, you will sometimes fail. When that happens, is there a correct and non-sorrowful way of handling it that will save the people who were lost and not just comfort the people who were left behind?”

“That is a very greedy request.”

Indeed it is, thought Horizon.

“But everything is eventually lost.”

“I see,” said the white dragon. “Then,” he continued. “When is the right time to live and to die?”

Question marks filled Horizon's mind.

That was her question. But the white dragon asked another question.

"Have you ever thought about that question in reverse?"

Horizon was speechless.

...*Well...*

She had not. For one, she did not know how to phrase it.

"When is the right time to live and to die...?"

How would that turn out in reverse?

A voice from the side provided the answer.

It came from the nudist. He patted her shoulder once and readily stated it.

"Isn't he asking about a way to accomplish what you think is right through your life and to also accomplish it even if you die?"

Masazumi scratched her head.

...*This idiot.*

She could not tell if he had prepared this in advance or if he had come up with it on the spot.

But, she thought. That line is probably his way of accepting Yoshiyori, the others who left, and the people who have arrived.

But Horizon nodded at the nudist's words.

And she rephrased his words in her own way.

"If you are to do what is right," she said, "when and how should you live and die?"

Horizon looked to the nudist.

"Toori-sama."

This was the opposite.

She and he were opposites.

They had two different viewpoints. If those were locations, then something else had to exist.

“A horizon and a borderline.” Horizon spoke from the horizon. “When is the right time to live and to die?”

And he responded.

“Yes,” he said from the opposite horizon. “If you want to do what’s right, how should you live and die?”

And Horizon responded.

“These horizons overlap. They have a point in common.”

“And what is that, Horizon?”

“...Judge.”

Horizon cleared her thoughts.

She kept everything unnecessary out of her mind and simply thought about this question and what led from it.

“That would be...where the horizons overlap. The place where life and death, right and wrong, overlap.”

Which was...

“The borderline that determines the rightness of life and death.”

She then said “judge” once more.

And this time, she clearly accepted something.

She accepted the identity of her question’s borderline.

“Where is it that the rightness of life and death are determined?”

She chose the optimal word within her to describe that place.

“Our dreams.”

That could be used to replace the “rightness” part of the equation. It

contained all of their hopes and their ideals. In order to verify and confirm that, Horizon asked him a question.

“When is the right time to live and to die if we are to fulfill our dreams?”

He responded.

“If you want to make your dreams come true, how should you live and die?”

“Judge.” Horizon held out her hand. “I say this to move from the one horizon to the borderline.”

That being...

“I wish to create a place where everyone’s dreams can come true. I wish to create a kingdom where I can have a dream,” she said. “So...let us go make our dreams come true, Toori-sama.”

She pulled him close while he pulled her close. And she knew this borderline was not just hers but all of theirs.

“With all of you with us.”

Asama heard rumbling laughter.

It was the dragon. He spoke while looking to the crumbling ceiling of the hall.

“An excellent conclusion. So let us celebrate.”

He opened his mouth.

The white dragon was preparing to fire his final dragon cannon.

“This ends the First Siege of Ueda. ...Matsudaira, I shall create a path for your retreat.”

He blew away everything directly above the hall, all the way to the top floor.

“Papa! Look...!”

In Sanada land, there was a natural outlook on a mountain cliff.

Atop there, a wooden academy was hidden by the trees.

To accommodate dragons, a giant entrance on the side led underground, but the front of the building had a small wooden door leading into the entranceway.

Two people stood on the wooden terrace in front of that entranceway: Sanada Nobuyuki and Masayuki.

Nobuyuki had his luggage for moving to Mito at his feet and he was looking back and forth between the sky and his father, Masayuki.

“Papa! I saw Saizou ascending earlier and now that’s Sasuke’s dragon cannon...!”

“...Watch,” the father said to his son. “This is the First Siege of Ueda. The power that supported Sanada is leaving us after bringing victory to Sanada. Those people supported this land since long before you or even I was born.”

With that, Masayuki sat down on a simple chair carved from a log.

“I never managed to tell them...but they were too kind.”

“You mean that they let this count as a rebellion so Nobushige and the others would be welcomed by Hashiba?”

“Not just that,” said Masayuki.

He lowered his gaze.

A few figures were visible in the schoolyard. They were Sanada students. Nezu, Yuri, and Anayama of the Ten Braves were among them. Torahide and the other Terrestrial Dragons would be in the forest and the land port down below.

Masayuki watched those students who were motionlessly viewing the sky.

“Time for a lecture, Nobuyuki.”

“Please not a long one, papa!”

Masayuki ignored his son. He also ignored the students who looked back and muttered “not again”. He simply viewed the light piercing the sky as he spoke.

“Listen. What really matters is not some spur of the moment whim. ...It is something constant, like an unmoving stone. So...”

So...

“I will not tell you to be like that. But after you leave and then return once more, this place will belong to you. ...This land was supported by thousand-year-old dragons. And we are headed to battle. Support this place and live a long life...even if a thousand years is out of the question.”

“Not to worry, papa! My teachers always said I was bound to live a long time!”

“That worries me in a number of ways, but I am relieved.” Masayuki smiled a little. “The Celestial Dragons are finally ascending into the sky. It will take time before they are fully released into the ley lines. It is our duty to see it through. They supported us for 160 years yet we can only watch over their departure for a few hours. ...Humanity really is irreverent.”

He relaxed and his entire body shrank in a little as if it were sighing.

“Sakai-sama. Thank you for giving them a real battle in the very end.”

Sakai looked into the sky from a mountain path in the forest.

The dragon cannon cut through the distant sky and vanished.

Instead of being launched at an enemy, that light was simply using up all of its power.

“That would be Sasuke...”

He finally arrived at the ruins. However...

“Sakai-sama? Why have you stopped? Over.”

“Well... I can probably see it better from here when he ascends into the sky.”

“What is this? You sound like an old man. Over.”

“You say that, but I am pretty old compared to those kids running around in the ruins. Also...”

Sakai opened a map of the surrounding area.

He instructed “Musashi” to perform an anti-air search of that area.

“There’s something odd in the air. And the dragons circling in the sky are afraid of something. ...I hate that we can’t stop any rude interruptions, but get a lock on it anyway, ‘Musashi’-san. I’ll ask Naito and Naruze to get the others out of there.”

Asama watched the hall collapse.

The floor above fell as well, but there was no sign of Saizou any longer.

...He must have ascended into the sky as light.

Celestial Dragons would return to the ley lines. That had happened already and it was about to happen again.

She could see the sky far overhead. A hole had been opened all the way through to the upper hall.

She could see the dragons circling in the sky to see the white dragon off.

And the dragon spoke as he released light from his entire body and faded away.

“Musashi princess.” He narrowed his eyes toward Horizon. “...It is fortunate that you are nothing at all like Motonobu.”

“Did you meet my father?”

“We discussed many old matters. He was very childish. ...I imagine he talked about what we discussed as if he had done it all himself. But there was one thing he would always say.”

That was...

“ ‘We must create a Testament Cross-Borders Unit.’ ”

Sasuke spoke of what had once defeated them and, whether they were real or fake, had occasionally existed before that and after that.

“The Testament Cross-Borders Unit exists for a certain purpose.”

“...To fulfill the Testament descriptions?” asked the silver wolf.

He had to shake his head. After all, the Testament Cross-Borders Unit itself existed by rejecting the Testament.

“Motonobu said the Testament Cross-Borders Unit exists to prevent the world from declining and to retune it. But it also surpasses the Testament.”

So...

“So he said they are the greatest overseers and stoppers for the Anti-Delay Pro-Tuning Project established in the Age of Dawn.”

Masazumi pictured Motonobu saying that.

...Yes, he did seem like that kind of character.

But Horizon bowed toward the dragon.

“I hope I can hear of this topic again.”

“You could write a book on it. And you should find this information in Houjou. Go there.”

And...

“Listen, princess. Also my two opponents, the rest of you, and...um, that nudist.”

“S-see, Toori-kun!? You’re placing unneeded pressure on him!”

“I can’t help it! My crossdressing stuff was destroyed!”

“About that.” Masazumi waved a hand toward the idiot. “Aoi, that crossdressing outfit is off limits from now on.”

“Why...!?”

Why did he act so shocked?

But Masazumi opened a sign frame and displayed a letter from M.H.R.R.

“That Katagiri boy who negotiated with you while you crossdressed has asked for a meeting. But if someone who knows what to look for saw that, they’d realize it was you. And in a way, having people figure it out is part of the act. So...”

It is accepted by Shinto, I suppose, she decided.

“If you’re going to crossdress, play a different character.”

“Ban it!” insisted Mitotsudaira. “You should completely ban it! Tomo, you say something too!”

Asama averted her gaze, but was that because of the crossdressing material in Shinto?

At any rate, Narumi cleared her throat.

Then the white dragon laughed quietly. He apparently was not angry.

“I have lived the right way for the past 400 years.”

Asama did not understand what he meant.

But he looked up to heaven. Directly above the slanted floor, the sky was the color of afternoon’s end.

The white dragon kept his gaze on the fading colors of the heavens as he spoke.

“Musashi princess. ...I am about to leave you. And much more will leave you or come to you. But even if there are those that leave you, I want you to remember this. ...Those who seek what is right will never wish to find that rightness in death,” he said. “Even if death is the conclusion they reach, that does not mean that death was their dream. It merely means death has visited them on the way to their dream. So...”

“This is a lot like what Toori-sama told me in England. If you spend your days having fun, you need not feel sad about the deaths along the way.”

“Yes. You *need* not feel sad. But you *can* do so if you have it in you.”

“That’s right,” agreed Asama. The dragon turned to face her, but was he telling her to continue or criticizing her for interrupting? She tensed her shoulders without thinking.

“...Do you understand this because life and death are so close to a shrine maiden?” he asked.

“Oh, y-yes. ...The sorrow of the survivors shows the people who have left just how much they are missed. It is like their pride.”

So...

“I think that is why the emotion of sorrow is avoided but accepted.”

“The Far East’s shrine maidens are very strong.”

“N-no, not really.”

Why is everyone glaring at me when I deny that?

Mal-Ga: “That dragon has a good eye for his enemy’s power...”

Sticky King: “Yes, that’s Asama for you...”

Obscene: “Indeed! Asama-kun is the only one powerful enough to shoot us to our destination!”

No. I’m not shooting you. I’m transporting you. Yes.

But the dragon was not done speaking.

“Take care of the Ten Braves. They too have dreams they are unsure they should have. And they have already had those dreams taken from them.”

“Taken...?”

“Yes.” The white dragon nodded. “They originally belonged to P.A. Oda in order to serve Hashiba in the future. They would have been the Seven Spears and three aides. But...”

But...

“They lost that in a battle against a group of ten that Hashiba brought in. That group defeated them and is now known as the Ten Spears. They-...”

The white dragon stopped there.

Eh? thought Asama as she looked up. It was too soon for the dragon’s end.

Then she saw the reason why he had stopped.

A long ether sword had pierced the white armor on his neck. And it was stabbed in all the way to the hilt.

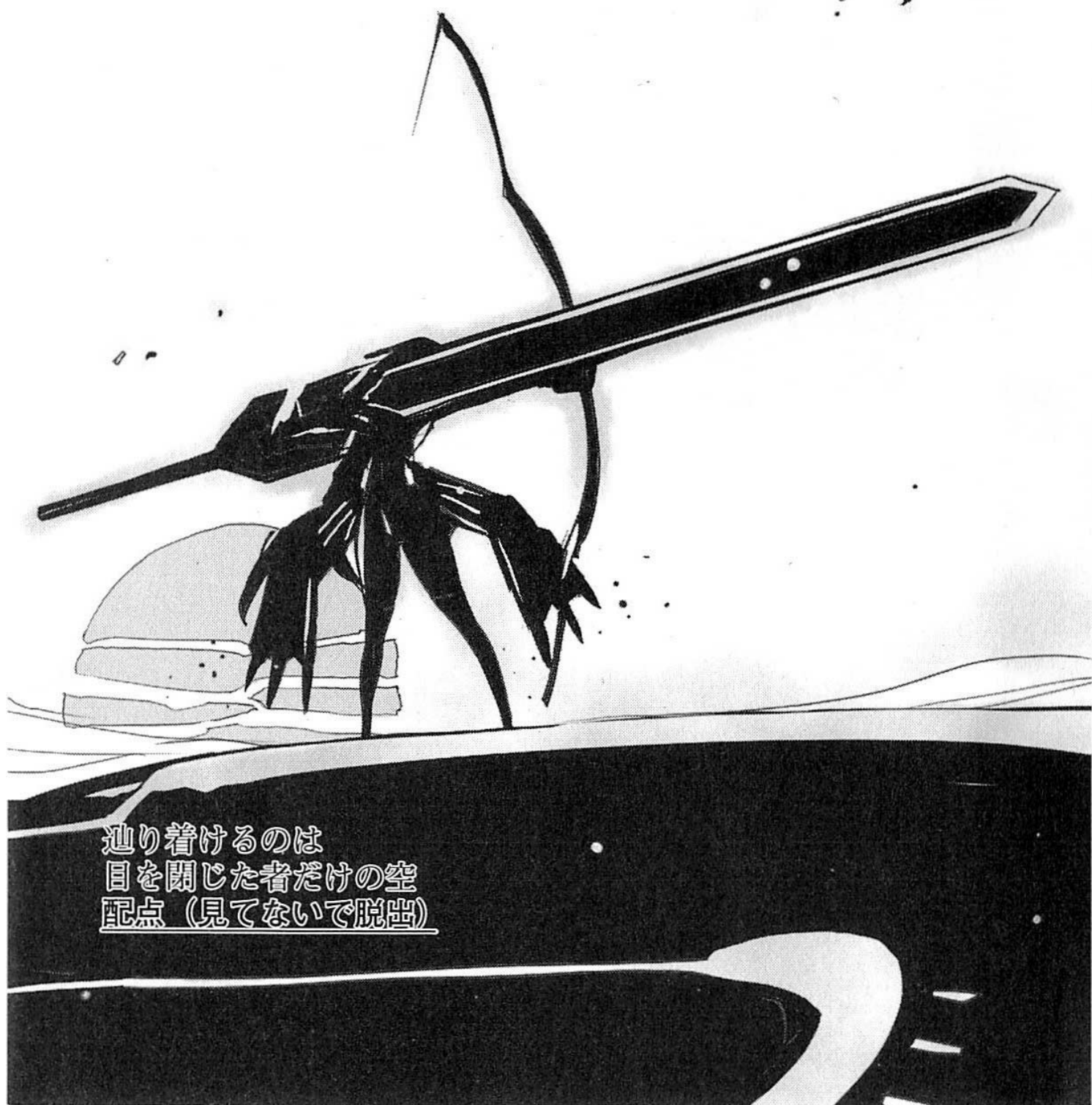
Asama knew what that ether sword was.

“That’s the anti-dragon sword arrow used by Oda’s Tsurugi Shrine, the primary shrine of P.A. Oda!”

Chapter 62: Arriver in a Sky of Passage

第六十二章

『過ぎ空の到着者』



辿り着けるのは
目を閉じた者だけの空
配点 (見てないで脱出)

You will arrive

In a sky only for those with closed eyes

Point Allocation (Escape Without Looking)

Two people saw the enemy attack which used an ether sword from the sky.

That winged pair was on their way to the dragon-destroyed ruins to rescue those inside.

One of them, Naruze, first saw a power shoot along a sharply-angled and guided trajectory into the hole in the ruins. And it was shaped like...

“An arrow!? ...No, a sword!?”

“I did a search and found something! ...That’s a giant anti-dragon attack from P.A. Oda’s Tsurugi Shrine!”

I do like how carefree Margot tends to put things, thought Naruze, but then she realized something was amiss.

If this as an anti-dragon attack, then it would be targeting the dragon in there.

But a large group of dragons was gathered overhead. It seemed like they all should have threatened the attacker, but...

...They’re afraid?

The young dragons were looking to the west.

But the older a dragon appeared to be, the more they distanced themselves from that direction.

Almost like they knew that attack had doubled as a threat.

And just as Naruze took a course to dive into the ruins...

“Margot, check behind us!”

“I’m not detecting a second shot! But, Ga-chan...!”

She knew what Margot was trying to say. The enemy was on the western national border. So her enemy-detection spell drew the enemy on its Magie Figur.

She could see an Oda ironclad ship in the distance. She zoomed in the image to check on the details, but...

...Huh?

It was really far away. It had to be more than thirty kilometers away.

But the enemy on that ship had hit the dragon in the ruins with precision guidance. Also...

“Wait...”

On the ironclad ship’s deck, she could see a shrine maiden wielding a large bow.

The girl wore white and red, she was supported by a binder skirt, and...

“What is that...?”

A long sword was attached to the bow. It was probably used to emit and guide the previous ether sword.

The shrine maiden closed the bow as if holding the 7-meter sword in her hands.

Both the sword and the bow vanished in a spray of ether light as they were closed inside an alternate dimension.

Behind Naruze, Margot frowned at the divine transmission she received.

“They’re sending a query and an introduction! I thought this was P.A. Oda, but it’s not! It’s M.H.R.R. and Hashiba’s...”

The term “Ten Spears” immediately came to mind and that was exactly what Margot said.

“Ten Spears #6, Hirano Nagayasu! ...She asked ‘Did that hit?’ ”

“Well, someone’s confident.”

But that was all. The figure’s black hair fluttered as she descended below deck.

She had left.

“This is nothing to make a fuss over.”

Horizon listened to the dragon’s voice as the ruins collapsed around them.

The white dragon broke and shattered the ether sword by twisting his neck.

There was nothing but light in the sky now and two colors were visible there: black and white. That was Naito and Naruze.

Inside the ruins, Urquiaga was also prepping his thrusters.

And the dragon still spoke.

“This was my fault for saying what was not allowed.” The white dragon viewed them instead of the sky. “You have finally caught up to our thousand years, humanity. We were born a thousand years ago. ...Humanity has finally filled that gap. And we will surpass you once more when we are born again.”

So...

“I hope you manage to catch up again after that.”

With that, the dragon disappeared.

He came apart.

But no one could bathe in that light. The pieces of the dragon all rose into the sky.

So Horizon looked overhead and nodded.

Because a bow would have taken her eyes off of it. And...

“It’s time to leave!!”

Everyone agreed with the pair who flew down from the sky.

They had to leave. They had to return home.

“Let us go,” agreed Horizon. “To where our dreams can come true.”

“In Sanada. ...So Nagayasu-san has settled things with Sanada.”

Katagiri sighed on a deck traveling through the sky. They were currently moving through an Hexagone Française field. This was part of their originally-

planned route, but...

“We’re in a hurry.”

With that, he looked behind him.

Four people were waiting there in their summer uniforms: Fukushima, Kiyomasa, Wakisaka, and Yoshiaki. Beyond them and behind the five ironclad ships was the giant Azuchi Castle traveling along the vast wheat field below.

But the Azuchi was not in its usual six-ship form.

Only three ships were following them.

The other three were visible beyond the wheat field and the distant horizon.

“Continue turning the Azuchi into bases. We need to hurry. Hashiba-sama is on the Azuchi, but her body is being fine-tuned and we need those as bases for the Great Return. Isn’t that right, Takenaka-san?”

Kuro-Take: “Yes, but don’t do anything too reckless.”

That divine transmission arrived as another ship separated from the Azuchi.

That left two. Which meant...

“Paris should come into view before long,” said Fukushima.

Katagiri nodded.

“Are you ready?”

Everyone nodded, but Kiyomasa raised her eyebrows and spoke.

“...If we are right about this, then we are walking into this knowing it is a trap, aren’t we?”

“That’s right,” answered Katagiri.

“Then,” responded Wakisaka. “How long will it take for Paris to fall?”

“Until the evening of the day after next. I think that will be the limit.”

“Conquering a nation and a capital in two days, huh?”

“No, it will actually be one day,” said Katagiri while he opened a map of the

area around Paris. “There are a variety of reasons, but we must flood Paris as a justification for the attack on Mouri. That will require some rapid construction using the transport ships and that will take a day. ...We will rush things on the scene and we will use negotiations to ensure they can’t interfere with the construction, but please assume that will take a full day. But,” he continued. “Duels and everything else will still be on the table. So do your best out there. Otherwise we won’t be able to respond to Musashi’s movements. So...”

There was movement in the sky behind them.

Another one of the Azuchi’s ships had broken away.

The giant silhouette flew away. “Ohh!” said Wakisaka as she waved at it, but she also asked a question.

“How much longer now?”

“We will arrive in the outskirts of Paris in another three hours. Please prepare for combat.” Katagiri placed a hand on his chest. “I will help you in any way I can.”

Kiyomasa felt some internal joy at Katagiri’s offer.

...He really has pulled himself together over the past few days.

Although if she said so, he would only deny it. But it would fill her with happiness if he would assist in the battle instead of just administrative matters and negotiations.

It made them feel like real “companions” who directly worked together.

...He’s no longer a child who needs our protection.

She gave a small nod at that thought. *I need to work hard so I can grow too.* And...

“Fukushima-sama?”

“Hm? Testament, what is it?”

Fukushima took her eyes off of her newly-modified Ichinotani and turned toward Kiyomasa.

The spear was heavier now that it had an extra tank attached to increase the number of attacks it could store. But...

“Our orders are the same as always, are they not? Head out there and win.”

There was still no ambition in Fukushima’s voice, but there was no helping that.

The enemy had heavy gods of war and powerful fighters like Katou Danzou. If they were to take on people like that...

“Everyone,” said Kiyomasa while standing her weapon, Caledfwlch, on the deck. “Let us go at this with everything we have. We need to drive out the enemy no matter what.”

And...

“Let us make sure we can respond to Musashi’s next action after they finish facing the dragons in those ruins. That way it will not be a huge deal even if we have to chase after them.”

In the end, the ruins collapsed inwards at almost the exact moment Masazumi left them.

The ruins were crushed and slid into the depression thanks to their own weight.

It sounded like a flowing river and occasionally included the sounds of trees snapping. And finally...

“A boom.”

Narumi was right. The sound of the ruins breaking against the bottom of the depression sounded like a large cannon firing. But the fact that they had heard that signified something important. Naito and Naruze confirmed it from where they waited in the sky.

“...It was like the view back there suddenly opened up.”

“The stealth divine protection surrounding the depression must have gone out.”

Asama used a map to predict the future shape of the terrain due to this collapse. She sent that to the local shrines and to Musashi and then she checked the surviving entrance to the ruins and the sky now visible through it.

After closing her sign frame, she took a breath.

“That ends our expedition into the ruins.”

The dragon light was still rising into the sky.

The heavens gained the colors of evening as the dragons returned there and the other dragons watched them go.

Someone clapped their hands as everyone looked up at that.

“Okay, time for a change of mood! If you’re in charge of putting together a report, get to that.”

After that, Oriotorai looked to Masazumi and tilted her head.

“The plan was four days and three nights including the travel day, so we still have a day left. What’ll we do with it?”

Masazumi looked down from the overhead light when she heard Oriotorai’s question.

“Umm,” she began while turning toward her homeroom teacher. “I think we will head to Houjou on the Musashi for our travel day. Because I don’t want to waste any time. We can use that time to prepare and recover.”

And...

“With the First Siege of Ueda complete, Matsudaira and Houjou are no longer bound by a treaty. Houjou is no more than an enemy now. ...We need to be prepared for that both mentally and strategically.”

“Judge,” everyone said.

They were all in agreement. Including Narumi, Gin, and Muneshige. Also...

“Us too.”

Noriki and the others at the base camp had hurried over to join them.

Ohiroshiki and Hassan, who were making curry below the tent, gave Noriki a thumbs up.

Noriki nodded back and spoke to the rest.

“Let’s go.”

That settled it.

And so Oriotorai looked to them all.

“Good work. It looks like you did a lot of work yourself, Gin, but you can get your arm repaired in the engine divis-...”

“Judge. About that.” Gin raised her surviving right arm and glanced over at Muneshige just once. “I think I too will officially join Musashi.”

“Gin...?”

Gin answered Muneshige’s question with a nod of acknowledgment. She clearly wanted him to relax.

“I do not care if this means losing my inherited name. Viewing myself even subconsciously as an outsider could get someone killed. And I believe we will be facing battles on that level from here on.”

Gin relaxed her shoulders after saying that.

“Master Muneshige,” she called before turning toward Honda Futayo.

Gin knew that girl, who was clearly eyeing the curry being made below the tent, was tough to the core. She was beyond help in some ways, but...

“This is a good place to not lose sight of ourselves and to train ourselves.”

“Judge. That’s right,” agreed Muneshige. “And you have found someone you can call a friend, haven’t you?”

“How can you say that so casually? Besides-...”

Gin stopped herself there. She knew denying it would only make things worse. So she took another breath and looked to everyone else.

“I will only say this once.” She bowed. “I look forward to working with all of

you.”

She raised her head and found them all looking at her. The ruins group had dirty equipment and faces. The standby group had unused combat outfits. But they were all smiling.

Seeing their expressions, Gin thought of everyone back in Tres España.

She decided to write them a letter. Not a divine mail, but a letter. She would tell them of her intention to train herself here.

And she knew what had to happen before she could return to that land someday.

“World domination. ...As a member of the Tachibana family, I will assist you in that goal.”

The two of them returning as the Peerless in the West would not be bad at all.

He gave a light push on her back. She could use that push to enter the circle of classmates, but perhaps she should not have made that greeting. She had only succeeded in making herself more nervous. But...

“Hey.” Honda Futayo waved a white plate from the tent. “Can we start eating?”

“Why must you do everything by your own rules...!?”

“You really do have a short temper, Gin-dono.”

The girl had picked up two plates and she held one out to Gin.

Gin naturally took it, but then panicked.

“Oh, Master Muneshige, take this.”

“Then you have mine.”

After exchanging plates, they stepped into the group of people side by side.

They joined the line of chatting people in front of the tent and more people got in line behind them.

...Yes.

It wasn't the end for me, thought Gin while looking up into the sky where the

dragon of inheritance had gone.

A dragon ascended into the sky.

The color was fading from that afternoon sky.

That light parted with the surface, but he did look fondly down on that surface.

That was where they had been.

The people who had been with them were there.

Those people were looking up at him.

...So many memories.

Masayuki, Nobuyuki, and the remaining Ten Braves were in the Sanada Academy schoolyard down there.

And a small light rose into the sky from a distant forest.

It was a smoke signal used by a ninja to indicate their location.

Was his inheritor there?

“Saizou, your inheritor must be over there as well.”

“I already went to look.”

A fading light conveyed its will to him.

“Look, Sakai is down there.”

He knew. *Honestly, he didn't even come to say hi? That man really hasn't changed.*

Something in the distance looked like a great dragon.

It was the Musashi.

Automatons stood on its deck – one for each ship. They were bowing toward the dragons.

Was it because that great ship was as large as a dragon? Or was it a courtesy to a fellow traveler of the sky?

“Thank you,” said the dragon as he accelerated into the sky. “Let’s go.”

He did not know if another age was coming. The Apocalypse was approaching and not even they understood what it was. But the Ten Braves, everyone else from Sanada, the Musashi group, and the Ten Spears were down there.

“Yes,” said the dragon. “I will leave that with all of you.”

Satisfied, the dragon did as he said.

He released his existence into the ley lines.

Last Chapter: Player with Interpretations

最終章

『解釈上の遊び手』



世界とは
広いのではなく
解らないのではなく
配点（誰もが）

The world

Is not vast

And is not incomprehensible

Point Allocation (Everyone)

It was past eight at night by the time they arrived back at the camp.

After an early dinner at the entrance to the ruins, they decided to make some preliminary observations of the collapse and then discussed the healing of injuries and what they would do next.

“That delayed us a fair bit.”

Mitotsudaira sank into some hot water while listening to the mountain stream in the night.

Near the base camp, there was a hot spring pond next to the stream at the top of the waterfall.

A simple stealth barrier was in place around it so no one could see in. There were sign frame windows to see out, but since the one on the ceiling was large and since it was night, it really did feel like an open-air bath.

The water soaked into her body. She was definitely injured and exhausted, but...

“The heat forcibly relaxes you...”

“Gin-san took a bath earlier and fell right asleep afterwards, didn’t she?”

That came from Adele. Some lamp spells floated in the bath courtesy of Asama, but Adele grabbed one and held it overhead.

“I’m kind of glad we went on this study camp.”

“Hee hee. You sure are tough, Adele. Especially after the silver chain holding Raging Beast got caught during the final escape, so you nearly died.”

“Well, I could have lived for a while down there thanks to the survival lockdown. And I could communicate via divine transmission and play games

until you managed to dig me out.”

Adele then grabbed Mitotsudaira’s arm.

“Oh, but I am thankful you managed to lift me out! Although I did have to wonder why I was being punished when I climbed out to find a nudist greeting me!”

“I wonder what that nudist is doing right now.”

“Oh, Horizon took her bath earlier, so the two of them already went to sleep,” explained Asama. “They’re sprawled out in the tent.”

“Hmm,” said Naomasa. “So he won’t have any time for you or Mito tonight.”

Asama froze in place. It had been too much of a surprise attack for Mitotsudaira as well.

“Wh-what do you mean by that!?”

“Nothing really. Just that he wouldn’t have time to speak with you and go over the day’s events.” Naomasa leaned back against the edge of the bath and looked up into the sky. “Hey, Horizon’s started pursuing a dream. So...”

“I will not feel out of place by my king’s side.”

Mitotsudaira had already made up her mind on this. She would support her king by his side just like a knight serving at the royal palace. So...

“And I would appreciate it if Tomo was there too.”

Asama realized the conversation had turned in her direction. That was definitely what had happened, but...

“I...”

There was honestly an indecisive part of her and that was a problem.

He needed her support, as did Kimi and Horizon, so she wanted to provide that. However...

.../...

She thought.

...What feelings do I have for Toori-kun?

Horizon viewed him as a reliable partner. Once she regained all her emotions, she would surely understand their position as lovers and feel all the more that he was someone she could never part with.

Kimi was with him as a sister and Mitotsudaira was with him as a knight.

But what about Asama?

She knew he had made up his mind since he was letting her sleep in the same tent. But...

“...I’m not sure what I should do.”

“Oh, dear. You’re just like Horizon. This is such a simple thing,” said Kimi. “Don’t ask what’s right. ...Just do what sounds like fun.”

After all...

“You were happy when you were able to place a blanket over my foolish brother last night, weren’t you?”

“...Eh!?”

This is why, thought Asama. And she could guess Mitotsudaira felt similarly soaking in the bath across from her.

This is why you can’t let your guard down around Kimi.

But Kimi narrowed her eyes and smiled.

“Crybaby.”

“H-how am I a crybaby!?”

“Because when it comes to my foolish brother, you cry when you’re angry, you cry when you’re relieved, and you cry when you’re happy. Oh, but Mitotsudaira was the same this time.”

“R-reveal any more and I’ll make you regret it!”

Mitotsudaira leaned forward, but Adele and Naomasa were already whispering to each other.

“That means something happened last night that made them cry with relief...”

“Well, that’s pretty standard for them, isn’t it?”

“N-no, um, please don’t continue the conversation without me...”

“Heh heh.” Kimi laughed quietly. “Horizon is prepared too. Because she doesn’t have all her emotions and her envy is still weak, things might get interesting later on, but she understands.”

Understands what?

“She understands that it ‘sounds like fun’ to have you two with us.”

“Well...”

Things might change in the future, but he had made up his mind.

...Right.

If the rest of them, Horizon included, did so as well, and they were all together, what would happen then?

It would be different from how things were now. But...

“Would a new normal begin?”

“Yes, if we inherit what we have now while continuing to move forward. And to ensure that, I will not hesitate to continue adding in more and more things that ‘sound like fun’. Fashions, makeup, and behavior all work on that basis.”

So...

“If you want to keep changing things toward what ‘sounds like fun’, then there’s no point in hesitating here. I mean, hesitate here and you’ll never get anything else that ‘sounds like fun’.”

Entertainers were good with words.

With that in mind, Asama leaned against the stone wall forming a side of the bath.

...That’s right...

She never did know when to call it quits. She felt like she should probably make up her mind soon. Especially when they were returning to Musashi for their travel day tomorrow.

That would be her last day to shift back into her everyday life while maintaining the study camp mood. Part of her thought she already had her answer, but another part told her to wait until tomorrow.

“Excuse me. Do you mind if I join you in that bath?”

Just then, a voice reached them from outside.

Is that a local? wondered Asama concerning the voice.

...That's an adult woman.

If she knew about the stealth, had she asked about it in the camp below? Some important local might be here to greet them. It was even possible this was a temporary form for a local god.

So Asama gestured for everyone to move further back. Then she spoke through a sign frame.

“Yes, you can join us. Please come in.”

Just in case, she had Hanami prepare a defense spell.

She heard some rustling of clothing in the darkness, but then she noticed something.

“Mito? ...Why are you so nervous?”

“Eh? U-um, it's just, well, that voice...and this scent...”

Just as she said that, the person entered the bath.

It only took an instant.

“Oh, my,” said Kimi in awe of the action. This woman had sunk shoulder deep into the bath without creating a single ripple.

And the moonlight illuminated her. It was a tall woman with an incredible amount of hair. And in a way...

...She looks like Mito.

“Mother!?” shouted Mitotsudaira. “What are you doing here during the Mouri battle!?”

Mitotsudaira protested.

But her mother, the Reine des Garous, ignored her and bowed toward the others.

“Everyone, thank you for taking such good care of my daughter. ...She’s just so quick to complain. Yes. When she was still living with me, she so loved to play at being a knight and reading that kind of picture book.”

...This is the worst attack yet today!

Mitotsudaira stood up to protest.

“W-wait, mother!”

“Oh, dear. What is it? And I see you still haven’t grown. Should I help you along with a massage?”

“Th-there is no good reason for doing that!”

“What are you talking about?” insisted her mother. “Your king told me he would not mind if his capacity was filled, you know? And can you provide as much ‘capacity’ as me?”

“Well...” trailed off Mitotsudaira before she realized something.

No one else was moving. Kimi spoke up first.

“I am glad to hear that my foolish brother had made up his mind even back then. Being indiscriminate would be one thing, but that talk of capacity could work as an absolute judgment.”

And Asama sounded dazed.

“U-umm, what does Mito’s mom mean by...um, c-capacity?”

Asama was useless and Kimi was on *her* side, making her an enemy. With Adele and Naomasa, the former was very interested while the latter had chosen to simply watch. However...

...Th-this isn’t what we were told!

“Mother! Why are you here!? The information we received earlier said

Hashiba's main force is arriving at the outskirts of Paris!"

"What are all these questions for? We're in the middle of the Mouri battle."

"Yes, but that Mouri battle is occurring in Hexagone Française, so-..."

Mitotsudaira stopped there.

She heard something in the sky. It sounded like a long and reverberating spray.

...Is that an aerial ship exiting stealth mode!?

Masazumi saw it from the bank of the mountain stream in the campground.

A white and rectangular aerial ship was appearing in the sky. She had seen it before at IZUMO.

"Hexagone Française's flagship...the Pension Versailles!"

Why? she wondered. Hexagone Française was supposed to be fighting the Mouri battle. And yet she recognized the person looking down at them from the deck.

"Mouri Terumoto!?"

That was not all. A fleet came into view alongside the Pension Versailles.

It was Houjou's aerial fleet.

Multiple rumblings filled the sky and Masazumi saw several people standing on the decks of the Houjou fleet.

"Houjou Ujinao..."

That was not all. Kakei, Unno, and Mochizuki of the Sanada Ten Braves stood alongside her. And...

"Is that...?"

A woman wore a P.A. Oda girls uniform.

It was Takigawa.

...Why?

Masazumi held out a frantic hand to stop the people exiting their tents and she asked her question aloud.

“Why is a joint group of Mouri and Houjou here!?”

“It’s simple.”

Asama listened to the Reine des Garous.

“We put together a plan to settle a few different battles all at once. The loss of the attack on Mouri due to flooding, the loss of the Siege of Odawara due to flooding, Takigawa’s loss at Komaki Nagakute, and...”

“...The Tensho Jingo Conflict between Matsudaira and Houjou, correct?”

“Testament.” The Reine des Garous smiled. “Complete them all at Odawara, and history will quickly turn against P.A. Oda and M.H.R.R. ...With Mouri Terumoto here, we have all the conditions save for the location. However...”

Asama understood. They could overcome the different location using interpretations.

“During the Battle of Novgorod, Hashiba used Novgorod as a different location. And in their attack on Mouri, they’re viewing Paris as Bitchu Takamatsu Castle. ...That means they can’t complain even if Mouri chooses to complete multiple history recreations with the flooding of Odawara.”

“Exactly. ...If Paris can be viewed as Bitchu Takamatsu Castle because it is the Mouri castle, then Odawara should also qualify if their true castle, the Pension Versailles, is there.” The Reine des Garous placed a hand on her cheek and laughed. “Whoever claims it first wins.”

“P-please wait, mother! ...What will happen to Hexagone Française!?”

“You don’t know what Hashiba is doing right now?”

She explained.

“They are using their attack on Mouri as an excuse to run rampant in Hexagone Française territory. They are a Far Eastern power, and yet they are trespassing on the land of Europe’s conqueror.”

So...

“They must be punished. ...Europe’s conqueror must punish the Far East’s conqueror.”

Fukushima saw light up ahead.

They were on the outskirts of Paris. And something was on the borderline between the outskirts and the farmland.

“Is that the Hexagone Française fleet?”

From the deck of the leading ironclad ship, she could see a great many ships. They appeared to make a full circuit of Paris’s outskirts and they had the latest form.

Of course, they were mostly armed transport ships, but they still formed a solid wall.

And a *lernen figur* appeared on the large ship in the very front and center.

It displayed the person standing on that ship’s deck: the Roi-Soleil.

“Welcome. But...what are you doing here, Miss Hashiba?”

Someone replied to him via divine transmission.

It was Katagiri. The *lernen figur* appeared next to Fukushima’s face between her and Kiyomasa who had walked up alongside her.

“We are here to recreate the attack on Mouri. ...Where is Mouri Terumoto-sama?”

“Terumoto is on *the front line*. ...Which would be Houjou, in order to end this age of warring states more efficiently,” said the man. “So why are you here, Miss Hashiba? Or should I say Miss Hashiba and associates? There was no need to bring war to Hexagone Française, and yet you have used military might to invade the land of Europe’s conqueror.”

...*They have really done it now.*

The enemy had laid a trap using his position as Europe’s conqueror and the same interpretation used to hold history recreations at Novgorod or Paris.

By framing Hashiba's attack as a nonexistent history recreation, they could fight back while keeping international public opinion on their side.

"Now, then," said the Roi-Soleil. "What will you do?"

Fukushima nodded at that question. They had already made their plans. And Katagiri clearly felt the same.

"We will hold the attack on Mouri here. Our request was to use this location."

"And how will you do that?"

"By flooding Paris."

"Testament." The Roi-Soleil gave a deep nod. "So that is how you will avoid accepting your mistaken history recreation. I do understand you must want to save face as a representative of the Testament Union. If you flood Paris here, you can get that approved as the true flooding of Mouri. Terumoto is in Houjou, but you will say she did that in order to trap you, won't you? ...However, Musashi will complete the Siege of Odawara in the meantime."

Fukushima understood what that meant. That was why they had settled this already.

"Musashi cannot act tomorrow thanks to their study camp."

"And you cannot act tomorrow because you must prepare for the flooding."

"Testament," admitted Katagiri. And then he made an announcement. "We will bring down Paris in the following day. And once the flooding is established, we will head to Kantou."

"And what will you do then?"

"We will intervene in the Siege of Odawara."

"I see." The Roi-Soleil smiled. It was a large smile. "Show me your pride, Miss Hashiba and associates. ...I will lend you one day. There are sure to be some skirmishes, but do your very best to flood Paris. Of course, even if you do accomplish that..."

Their enemy turned his back as he spoke.

"Europe's conqueror will not forgive you."

“Now, we will need to make a number of preparations. We will use tomorrow for that. And the day after that, we will be enemies.”

Asama heard the Reine des Garous’s words echoing through the night.

With the flowing of the mountain stream in the background, that queen stood up and let the spring water drip down.

The sight brought a thought to Asama’s mind.

...She’s so big...

Just overall. Yes, I wasn’t only referring to her boobs or height.

However, a fleet was flying in the sky behind that queen. It was flying south, toward Houjou.

She heard the rumbling of those giant forms pushing the air out of the way and she heard the Reine des Garous speak with a smile.

“Make sure you enjoy tomorrow, Nate and everyone else. ...I will help out with that.”

“Huh!? Wh-what are you talking about!?”

“Well.” The Reine des Garous was entirely calm. “We aren’t enemies tomorrow. ...I need to take a good look at my daughter’s everyday life.”

She held her hands together and bowed.

“Thank you for this opportunity.”

“Um...yes.”

Asama stared blankly up into the heavens while Mitotsudaira protested in the background.

A lot had happened. They had been left with things, some people had left them, and other people had just arrived.

Some like Gin had made a decision. Others like Sakai had given them a task to accomplish.

And what was Asama to do in the middle of it all?



——ウエルカム態勢です。

She felt like part of her had made up her mind and another part had not.

She recalled everything that had happened today, but...

“I bet even more is going to happen tomorrow...”

Kimi smiled a little.

“Of course it is.”

After all...

“We pass each day onto the next.”

—You are all welcome to join us.

Afterword

That was Kyoukai Senjou no Horizon 5-B. This was the first A-B only volume in a while, so I made sure a lot of progress was made. Some of them are finding things tough in both their public and private lives, but that just means they need to work hard.

Anyway, the movements around Kantou in this era are kind of hard to figure out even in Japanese history. I kind of see it like a blank period between the fall of the Kamakura Shogunate and Ieyasu establishing his shogunate in Edo.

This is generally taught in Japanese history as laying the groundwork for the unification of Japan and it tends to focus on Hideyoshi as the leading figure in that. Ieyasu was under Hideyoshi's command during this period, so even if Ieyasu controlled most of Kantou, the Hideyoshi POV just sees that as one of his men controlling Kantou. And since the only real action Hideyoshi takes is the attack on Houjou, it isn't talked about all that much.

Similarly, we tend to focus on Nobunaga too these days, but until Nobunaga got famous in video games and dramas, he was really only seen as "Hideyoshi's superior". When you look at it from a historical viewpoint, he didn't unify Japan, so while you might talk about his political achievements, he's just one of the many people who laid the groundwork for the creation of Japan. This is one of the reasons that people who get into Japanese history from video games, manga, and novels find themselves saying "Huh? Why does everyone have such a poor opinion of my favorite commander?" Basically, school lessons aren't there to teach you about heroes or characters. It's about Japanese *history*, so anyone who wasn't involved in the creation of Japan will ultimately be omitted.

Now for the usual chat.

"Did anything fun happen in class during your schooldays?"

"In home ec class during elementary school, we gathered some wild plants

growing near the school and made tempura. ...The next day, 23 of the 42 kids in my class were out sick, but our teacher went on with the lesson without commenting on it.”

“Report them.”

“Yeah, but then they’d get in trouble with the police. Looking back, that was a pretty sketchy year of school.”

“Yeah, that happens sometimes.”

Also, that number of kids in a class really makes you think of the old days. My work background music this time was Hotgirl by Pearl. It feels like a head-on expression of power, but you need something on that level for a fight against dragons.

Anyway, this time I was wondering about this question:

“Is there anyone who isn’t left with anything?”

Now, Volume 6 will begin some big and exciting battles. Wait just a while longer.

2012. A morning nearing the end of summer.

-Kawakami Minoru

Notes

1. ↑ The Japanese term for a sex museum.
2. ↑ Tobi in Japanese, hence the Toby nickname with Marfa.
3. ↑ Pronounced the same as the Gukansho.
4. ↑ Referring to [this](#).